

EXPRESS

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ArtsBeat/Music MARIACHI? AT YOSHI'S? FIESTA MEXICANA MONDAY NIGHT

By Andrew Gilbert

Mexico, with Sushi

Crossing borders comes naturally to Juanita Newland-Ulloa. Born in New Jersey to an American mother and a Panamanian father, she grew up in Panama and Mexico City. Throughout her singing career, she has moved back and forth constantly between the classical world of opera,

"In Latin events there are always more groups involved," Ulloa said during a recent interview at El Tapatio, a Fruitvale restaurant that serves as a home base for Mariachi Los Halcones. "I love to sing but I need to bring the American and Mexican communities together. So I called the Mexican

musicians hang out waiting for gigs.

DISTAFF MARIACHI

"In the mariachi tradition, many of the most famous men, such as Jorge Negrete, have been starving opera singers," Ulloa says. "But among the women, they were singing gut-

wrenching, emotionally charged things with incredible passion, but without training. I realized I'm the only female starving opera singer I know."

With the Picante Ensemble, Ulloa has surrounded herself with a band that embodies her need for authenticity and her academic impulse (she has degrees from Yale, UC Berkeley, and the Nice Conservatory of Music). Under the direction of flamenco guitarist Jorge Liceaga, the sextet has developed into a powerful unit, capable of the same urgency and precision that defines Ulloa's clear, soaring mezzo-soprano.

HER BUSY CAREER

Besides teaching and conducting workshops on Mexican music, Ulloa has been hired as a voiceover artist for CD-ROMs and toy-

dolls. Her soaring vocals are featured in the award-winning documentary on César Chávez, *Fight in the Fields*. As a singer, composer, and pianist, she's recorded a series of sing-along children's CDs featuring Latin American songs, *Canta Conmigo*, as well as *Mujeres*, a passionate CD of songs by Mexican women composers. Her most recent album, *Mariposa*, is a gorgeous collection of Latin American lullabies and original songs that's as much a treat for adults as for children.

"If someone calls me to sing or use my voice in any way, I'll drop anything I'm doing," Ulloa declares. "I just love to use my voice. If I can wake up the inspiration in someone else through what I feel when I'm projecting this, that's the ultimate for me."

By Kisa Krueger



Your basic female starving opera mariachi singer: Juanita Newland-Ulloa

Peruvian folkloric music, and various Mexican styles. But nothing Ulloa has done before is quite like her plan for Monday night, when she presents a Mexican Independence Day celebration at Yoshi's, the first time music from Mexico has come into the Japanese restaurant and jazz spot.

The event started as a simple performance by Ulloa and her band, the Picante Ensemble. But Ulloa decided that it was too big an opportunity to use all by herself. She recruited Mariachi Los Halcones, a band from Guadalajara that relocated to Oakland four years ago, and the Ensembles Ballet Folklorico de San Francisco, a thirty-member dance troupe that will be represented by two couples.

consulate, and they wanted to be a part of this and it just grew from there."

Gathering sponsorship from various organizations, Ulloa has turned the event into a major undertaking, with part of the proceeds going to support youth scholarships at the Community Music Center of San Francisco, a nonprofit educational institution in the Mission District. For Ulloa, who recently presented a show at the Plush Room consisting of torchy Mexican ballads written by women, the performance gives her the opportunity to explore the forceful mariachi vocal style that first sparked her interest in singing when she was a little girl walking past Garibaldi Square, the legendary Mexico City district where

FIESTA MEXICANA with Juanita Newland-Ulloa and the Picante Ensemble takes place at 8 and 10 p.m. Monday,