

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

www.hotcoco.com

Volume 88, Number 139

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 15, 1999

c 46 cents plus tax

MUSIC

Female composers take over this weekend

By Georgia Rowe
TIMES CORRESPONDENT

Bach, Beethoven and Brahms aside, male composers still dominate programs in every concert hall. This weekend, music by women will highlight concerts in Oakland and San Francisco. Here's a rundown.

"A TRIBUTE TO MEXICAN WOMEN COMPOSERS," 8 p.m. Saturday, St. Cuthbert's Episcopal Church, 7932 Mountain Blvd., Oakland. Tickets are \$15. Call 510-632-6296 or 510-635-4949.

Remember "Besame Mucho"? The song, which was a No. 1 hit for the Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra, has been performed by everyone from Nat King Cole to Plácido Domingo.

What people don't remember is that "Besame Mucho" was written by Consuelo Velasquez, one of Mexico's greatest songwriters. According to Oakland musicologist Juanita Newland-Ulloa, the contributions of Velasquez and other Mexican women composers have been vastly underrated.

In a special concert Saturday at St. Cuthbert's Episcopal Church, Newland-Ulloa and other performers will pay tribute to Velasquez, María Grever, Ema Elena Valdelamar and other women of the Latin American songwriting tradition.

Newland-Ulloa, a singer, pianist and songwriter, will perform with her own Picante Ensemble, featuring guitarist Rolando Morales. Also on the bill are Trio Las Pochas, singer/composer Lydia Zapana, and dancers Beatriz Restrepo and Cristina Ulloa.

Velasquez, Grever and Valdelamar were composers in the 1930s and '40s. Each wrote several significant hits; Grever's biggest was "What a Difference a Day Makes," which was recorded by Dinah Washington and others. Valdelamar wrote "Mucho Corazon," recently recorded on a million-selling disc by pop star Luis Miguel.

Yet even though their songs achieved international status, the women themselves are virtually unknown outside of Mexico. In a recent interview, Newland-Ulloa, who just released a CD titled "Mujeres: Romantic Songs by Women Composers, Vol. 1, Mexico," says that most people think of Latina musicians only as singers.



JUANITA NEWLAND-ULLOA and Picante Ensemble will help pay tribute to Mexican women composers on Saturday at St. Cuthbert's Episcopal Church in Oakland.

"Many of the great pieces of Latin American music have been written by women," she says. "These composers are examples of refined, well-educated women composers, which is in contrast to the stereotype."

As she was assembling material for "Mujeres," Newland-Ulloa talked to many musicians who were famil-

iar with the songs but had no idea of their origins.

"I was amazed that even the best and most knowledgeable musicians thought that 'What a Difference a Day Makes' was written by some American jazzman," she says. "That was a wake-up call, and since then, my main job has been to unearth

these contributions by Mexican women who have been totally unrecognized."

Part of the task, she says, is restoring the songs to their original versions. "What a Difference a Day Makes," for example, has been somewhat romanticized in its English translation.

"Many of the great pieces of Latin American music have been written by women. These composers are examples of refined, well-educated women composers, which is in contrast to the stereotype."

— Juanita Newland-Ulloa,
musicologist

"In Spanish, the message is different," says Newland-Ulloa. "In the English, everything is rosy and wonderful. In the original, it's more satirical and biting, because the woman has been rejected. She knows they're coming back together, but she says 'that kiss you've gotten before you might not get again.' It's a little more picaresque."

THE WOMEN'S PHILHARMONIC SEASON-OPENING CONCERT, 8 p.m. Saturday, Herbst Theatre, War Memorial Veterans Building, 401 Van Ness Ave., S.F. \$20-\$36. 415-392-4400.

The Women's Philharmonic opens its season Saturday at Herbst Theatre with works by 20th-century women composers: Libby Larsen, Mabel Daniels, Sheila Silver and Gwyneth Walker.

Soprano Christine Brandes, a frequent soloist with the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, will sing the West Coast premiere of Larsen's "Sonnets from the Portuguese," a setting of three sonnets by Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

The evening's other featured work is the world premiere of Walker's "Symphony of Grace." Silver's 1990 "Dance of Wild Angels," and Daniels' 1931 "Deep Forest" are also on the program.