

Ulloa Productions
Oakland, California

For additional information: Gabrielle Beatrice
Tel.: (510) 528 - 0860

TRADITIONAL MARIACHI FINDS A NEW ENERGY AND A NEW AUDIENCE IN GIVING VOICE TO WOMEN

In a career spanning 18 years, pianist, composer, and vocalist JUANITA ULLOA has had the privilege of recording, arranging and performing some of the most beloved musical traditions of Latin America; toured from Madrid to Peru and across the United States; appeared as a soloist in symphony concerts, and sung principal mezzo-soprano roles with several opera companies. She has been honored with an Addy Award for her voice-over work in radio advertisements, received six first- and second-place prizes for her singing in the International Festival of Latin American Song, and most recently, a Parents' Choice Award for her original Latin lullabies.

However, nothing prepared her for the creative challenges and variety of talents that would be required to bring her latest project to a successful release. As she began to research the idea of honoring Latin women composers, she found some evidence of Mexican and Latin women composers in the romantic bolero and ballad genres, but very little in the "Ranchero" tradition popular in Mariachi.

The first CD to result from these efforts was "Mujeres" ("Women"), released in 1999, which paid tribute to the female romantic composers of Mexico. It included songs by Maria Grever, composer and lyricist of "What A Difference a Day Makes," in 1934, and Consuelo Velasquez, who wrote "Besame Mucho," ("Kiss Me A Lot") in 1941, considered in some circles to be the song of the century. "Mujeres" was nominated for a Latin Grammy Award, received glowing reviews, and an award from the International Festival of Latin American Song. Music critic Derk Richardson wrote, "*Juanita does more than just bring to light the works of under-appreciated women songwriters . . . she lights up their music with her gorgeous, dramatic singing, and joins their company with her own romantic compositions.*" And, the Oakland Tribune called the project, "*A terrific collection of romantic tunes by female composers including Grever, Velasquez, and Ulloa herself.*"

The series continues with the upcoming release of the second CD, entitled "Mujeres y Mariachi" ("Women and Mariachi"), in which Juanita blazes an exciting new trail in the history of Mariachi by composing for the female voice and including a women's perspective in the lyrics for the first time. "Mujeres y Mariachi" will be released in May, to coincide with Cinco De Mayo celebrations honoring Mexican independence; it is priced at \$14.99.

THE MARIACHI TRADITION

The word Mariachi refers to a strolling Mexican orchestra that uses a specific lineup of 15 instruments to play songs in distinct Mexican rhythms such as bolero, ranchera, huapango, and more. Although Mariachi is hundreds of years old, it has seen two distinct periods of influence and change. The first came in the 1600s, when the instrumentation was influenced by Spanish orchestras coming to Mexico after the conquests, and the second in the 1930s, with the advent of radio and film providing the means for Mariachi to reach new audiences.

However, the Mariachi style has always been influenced by the fact that all of the composers and instrumental performers were men, and they do not compose for the full range of women's voices. "*Hardly any of the Mariachi repertoire is written by women or written specifically for women, and few, if any, of the soloists has had the opportunity to receive a complete musical education and go on to compose,*" Ulloa explains.

In spite of this, there is documentation showing the existence of all-female Mariachi bands in Mexico since the 1940s (some women were able to learn the tradition by being born into a family with a male Mariachi performer), and the number of female groups has grown substantially since the 1990s. Certainly the best-known female vocalist in the Mariachi genre in the United States is Linda Ronstadt, who herself was surrounded by a family of traditional Latin musicians throughout her childhood, and who created a signature style by incorporating elements of Mariachi in a pop music setting.

In a similar way, "Mujeres y Mariachi" brings together the tradition of Mariachi with Juanita Ulloa's background in opera, using classical vocal technique, improvisation, and a female point of view in the interpretation of the music and writing of lyrics. Juanita spent 18 months researching the story of women in Mariachi, then writing and arranging songs especially for women to sing and play, offering a new voice and a woman's perspective where it had never been heard before. In doing so, she infuses this immensely popular style of music with a new energy and a new perspective, and lays the groundwork for a future generation of women to continue its evolution by further exploring the creative potential of Mariachi.

She composed three new contemporary "huapangos," a popular Mariachi rhythm, and arranged traditional songs using the full female vocal range. Before this recording, no one had ever applied this approach to female singing, nor had anyone composed new middle sections, which Juanita has done for several of the traditional songs to demonstrate more expressive vocal possibilities. In doing so, she declares the beginning of a new "Mariachi Coloratura" style which achieves a fuller and more authentic expression, while still honoring the richly romantic and passionate traditions of Mariachi.

MARIACHI COLORATURA

Juanita's voice teacher, the world renowned Jane Randolph, coined the term Mariachi Coloratura to describe her unique voice type and repertoire. The term evolved only after Juanita had sung opera professionally for eight years during which Randolph realized that her voice did not fit any of the typical operatic registers or vocal categories because Juanita was able to move between mezzo-soprano and soprano very easily. (Randolph is best known as the trainer of such international stars as mezzo-soprano Frederica Von Stade and counter-tenor Brian Osawa.)

The beginnings of Juanita's unique Mariachi Coloratura technique are most evident in the song "La Voz de Mujer—Concierto para Una Sola Voz" ("The Voice of Women—Concert for the Solo Voice"), where Juanita's fast and/or high vocal passages decorate the music after the original song is presented in a lower register. In "El Pastor," ("The Shepherd") Juanita composes and sings coloratura to imitate the sound of the shepherd's flute, a theme in the song.

"Mujeres y Mariachi" has received pre-release endorsements by leaders in the music industry including Erick "Chico" Manqueros, host of the radio show, Latin Style of Jazz, and a critic for Latin Beat magazine, who said, *"This has to be one of the best produced and performed collections of Mariachi I have ever heard . . . a powerful and creative sound."*

The band heard on "Mujeres y Mariachi" is made up of top-notch Mariachis from two groups based in Los Angeles, California, Mariachi Voz de America, led by Ricardo Mata, and Mariachi Internacional, led by J. Jesus Gomez, formerly of the famed Mariachi Vargas, considered the top Mariachi band anywhere.

Maestro Peter Jaffe, conductor of the Stockton Symphony, contributed two arrangements to the new CD, and Juanita performed his new arrangements with the Symphony on July 4, 2001 in a concert televised throughout northern California. Some of the new songs have also been arranged for performance with the Sacramento Symphony, La Jolla Chamber Orchestra, and others for upcoming concerts during the spring and summer.

Previous recordings by Juanita Ulloa include her multi award-winning "Canta Conmigo" ("Sing with Me") series of Spanish-language folk music tapes and CDs for children and related songbooks. Her last CD release, "Mariposa," presents original Latin-flavored lullabies and quiet songs and was recently recognized with a Parents' Choice Award. Juanita's recordings have been recommended in People Magazine and a variety of other publications.

In addition to her performing and recording career, Juanita has been a vocal teacher, workshop leader, lecturer and ethnomusicologist, and has been fortunate enough to make her living entirely from her musical pursuits for almost two decades.