



Juanita Newland-Ulloa has lived in many countries, but she says Mexico captured her soul.

Mexican music featured in special concert

BY NORA VILLAGRAN
Mercury News

SHE WAS born in New Jersey, raised in Panama for six years and educated at Yale and the University of California-Berkeley.

But Mexico is her spiritual homeland. That is why singer/composer Juanita Newland-Ulloa has found her voice and her strength in Mexican music.

"My soul and my heart are completely Mexican," says Newland-Ulloa, who lives in the Oakland hills.

"I spent my adolescent years in Mexico. I absorbed this wonderful culture of people whose hearts are so open. It's given me a great model for how to open my

heart to others."

Newland-Ulloa shares her love of all things Mexican in her passionate romantic ballads for adults, in her sweet lullabies and fun sing-a-longs for kids — and in her mariachi music for all ages.

Monday, Newland-Ulloa and her band, Picante Ensemble, headline the first Mexican music concert at Yoshi's jazz club in Oakland's Jack London Square.

Juanita Newland-Ulloa & Picante Ensemble

Fiesta Mexicana

■ **Where:** Yoshi's at Jack London Square, 510 Embarcadero West, Oakland

■ **When:** 8 and 10 p.m. Monday

■ **Information:** www.juanita-music.com

■ **Tickets:** \$16; www.yoshis.com, (510) 238-9200, (925) 762-2277

Juanita Newland-Ulloa with her band, Picante Ensemble, which will headline "Fiesta Mexicana," celebrating Mexico's Independence Day.



SPECIAL TO THE MERCURY NEWS

Yoshi's features sounds of Mexico

■ SINGER

from Page 1E

"Fiesta Mexicana" celebrates Mexico's Independence Day, which is today, and Latino Heritage Month. The program also features entertainment by the dance troupe Ensembles Ballet Folklórico de San Francisco and Mariachi Los Halcones (The Falcons).

Picante Ensemble includes musical director Jorge Liceaga, bass player David Belove, trumpeter Marvin McFadden, soprano vocalist and violist Virginia Morgan, drummer and guitarist Pepe Jacobo, and pianist Jonathan Alford.

The event is sponsored by the Mexican Consulate, the Centro Cultural Mexicano, La Peña Cultural Center and Russ Jennings Productions.

A portion of the proceeds goes to benefit scholarships for low-income students at the Community Music Center of San Francisco, where Newland-Ulloa taught Latin-American music for several years.

The non-profit organization offers a curriculum of ethnically diverse music to children and adults — regardless of income and musical expertise.

"There are all kinds of music here," says Stephen Shapiro, executive director at the center. "We don't believe that just one kind of music should be taught to the exclusion of all others."

Newland-Ulloa became an aficionado of Mexican music at the age of 8 after her father, a businessman, moved the family to Mexico City.

By then, Newland-Ulloa had already fallen in love with Latin American music during her early childhood in Panama.

"I remember *carnaval*," she says. "All of those wonderful songs I've recorded in 'Canta Conmigo' ('Sing With Me'). Those tunes have always stuck in my head."

But it was in Mexico, she says, where her

love of music flowered.

"In Mexico, my dad would take me to hear mariachi bands. I remember those powerful voices and how their music would just soar, even without microphones. I tried to sing along, but my voice then couldn't match their power. I decided I wanted to figure out how to do that."

Newland-Ulloa did just that. She went on to study music at Yale University, where she learned ethnically diverse music and music history. Later at UC-Berkeley, she developed her vocal training. She further developed her talents at the Nice Conservatory in France.

Her bolero CD "Mujeres" ("Women") has been nominated for a Latin Grammy this year. And she recently performed a Latin cabaret show in San Francisco, with music from "Mujeres" and from "Mariposa" ("Butterfly)," her latest CD.

For Newland-Ulloa, playing at Yoshi's will be "like coming home. Every time I play that music, it reminds me of everything beautiful I grew up with."

This is why, she says, "I've devoted myself to sharing Latin culture with the American community. It's a crime that more Americans don't learn another language and about other cultures. I want to encourage kids, especially, to learn about other people."

Breaking down fences is also her objective, when it comes to gender stereotyping.

In her determination to be a composer and to perform mariachi music, she says, she has "constantly run into attitudes" of male domination.

"Men are very open when it comes to women singers because they're used to that. But when it comes to women in business, in composition and in running a band — their egos come into play. They're still learning to take it from a woman."

Contact Nora Villagrán at nvillagrán@sjmercury.com or (408) 920-5909.