



On May 23, 2014
the Esperanza
hosted a celebration
of Rita Vidaurri's
90th birthday at
the Guadalupe
Theater. Two of the
many tributes of
that evening are
reprinted here for
Voz readers.

THE ENDURING INFLUENCE OF RITA VIDAURRI...

by Antonia Castañeda

It was from one-hour-a-week Spanish language radio programs and from the stories that recently-arrived Tejano migrant workers, whom we met in the labor camps, hop yards, and sugar beet fields of Eastern Washington state, that I first heard of La Calandria, Rita Vidaurri, in the early 1950s. Our fellow Tejanos regaled us with stories of seeing Vidaurri in a Tin Tan revue at El Teatro Nacional in San Antonio before they left pa'l norte, or at a club in the lower Rio Grande Valley. Though I never met her in person, I knew her music and voice through the stories that new and returning migrants remembered, hummed, played, danced to, and told and retold, time and again.

The influence of Rita Vidaurri and other Tejana singers on my generation is immeasurable. In the distant Pacific Northwest, they helped us to retain our language. Their lyrics revealed our stories, contained our dreams, sang our sorrows, and healed our spirits. We came from the same place as they, our parents told us — *de la misma mata*, not only from South Tejas and San Antonio but from the same poverty. They taught by example — that if they could survive and thrive, so could we.

From the late 1930s to the mid-to-late 1950s, Rita performed nationally and internationally in all major Spanish language musical venues. In Cuba, playland of wealthy Euro Americans during this same period, she toured with Celia Cruz, doyen of Cuban music; she toured in Mexico with orchestras and actors, and in San Antonio with Cantinflas, Tin-Tan, el Piporro, and the Mariachi de Tecatitlán.

Beginning in 2002, as part of their long-term Arte es Vida project, centered on re-membering and recovering traditional cultural expressive arts, performance, and other art forms, the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center brought Vidaurri, then 78, back into the public performance sphere while celebrating Lydia Mendoza's 85th birthday. With Vidaurri's help, the Esperanza located other local singers of her era: Beatriz Llamas ("La Paloma del Norte"), Janet Cortez ("Perla Tapatia") and Blanquita Rodríguez ("Blanca Rosa"); in 2007 they, along with Rita, became Las Tesoros del Westside. Since then, they have continued to perform in local and state community-based venues. Tonight, Las Tesoros are here, along with others, to pay tribute to "La Calandria" on her 90th birthday! ¡Feliz cumpleaños, Rita! ♦

Bio: Antonia Castañeda, Tejana-born feminist historian, recently retired from St. Mary's University, paid tribute to Rita with recuerdos from her own life. Antonia, with her husband, Dr. Arturo Madrid, has made San Antonio her home.