

LA PERLA TAPATIA, ¡PRESENTE!

AUG. 17, 1931 -

AUG. 24, 2014

Beloved Ranchera singer, Anita Janet Cortez, known by her stage name, "Perla Tapatia" died on August 24, 2014 after spending a short time in the hospital surrounded by friends and family. She died hearing stories of her life and times and listening to songs that her compañeras from Las Tesoros de San Antonio sang to her as they reminisced about their lives. An occasional joke from Rita or a familiar canto would result in a momentary flutter of Perla's eyes or a small gesture of recognition. Her compañera of 34 years, Marie A. Torres, faithfully accompanied Perla in her last days at the hospital and then at home with her family. The final rosary and funeral offered friends and family an opportunity to get to know Perla a little better before being laid to rest. Part of the Golden Age of Ranchera singers, Perla was born in San Antonio to a single unwed mother in 1931 who gave her up for adoption. Her mother was Anglo, but Perla grew up a Mexicana adopted by the Cortez family. She was lovingly teased with nicknames like "la güerita" and "la gringita." Her brother recalled her being brought home by his mother toppling him from his roost as "the baby." Thereafter, he became the "big brother" and the two remained inseparable throughout their lives often fishing together and sharing a lifetime of experiences.

Perla grew up on Matamoros St. in the Westside of San Antonio. She began singing as a young girl at a family event at the Cabana Night Club when Meme Reyes asked her to perform on the spot. Perla got her first big break when she sang with Mexican comic, Tin Tán, at the Municipal Auditorium in the mid-fifties. In order to perform on stage, she had to borrow a ranchera costume from famed singer, Lydia Mendoza. Having established herself as a ranchera singer, Perla performed throughout the U.S. and Mexico. In later years she adopted her own style using a black bolero hat and colorful dramatic capes called ruanas that were designed by her niece, Connie Cortez. At her rosary, each of the Tesoros de San Antonio, whom Perla sang with in recent years, received one of Perla's ruanas. Rita was gifted the blue one — this in spite of the fact that Blanca laid claim to it as a Lanier graduate. Blanca received Perla's purple ruana and Beatriz, the youngest of the Tesoros, got the red cape. Marie, Perla's life companion, kept the black cape, Perla's first ruana.

In 1973 Perla was diagnosed with throat cancer which led to a lifetime of struggle and 40 operations of the trachea. She even stopped singing for a while. After losing part of her voice box to cancer, she lived with the aid of a tracheostomy, an open airway in her throat. Her doctor told her she would never sing again. Despite this prediction, Perla began singing again and returned to the doctor to show him that he had been wrong. She was the only known singer to sing with a tracheostomy. In 2013, she was diagnosed with lung cancer and recently developed complications including pneumonia. At the funeral, both of her families — the family Perla grew up with and her family of origin whom she reclaimed in the last decades of her life, were present.

The surviving members of Las Tesoros, Rita Vidaurri, Beatriz Llamas, and Blanquita Rodríguez sang farewell to Perla at her grave site at Mission Burial Park South. The Esperanza Center extends our heartfelt condolences to Perla's partner of 34 years, Marie A. Torres, Perla's families, Las Tesoros de San Antonio and her many, adoring fans. Perla Tapatia's last public appearance was at Rita Vidaurri's 90th birthday tribute sponsored by the Esperanza Center at the Guadalupe Theater in May of 2014 where she sang a rousing "Fallaste Corazón" to Rita. She received a standing ovation. **QEPD ♦**

