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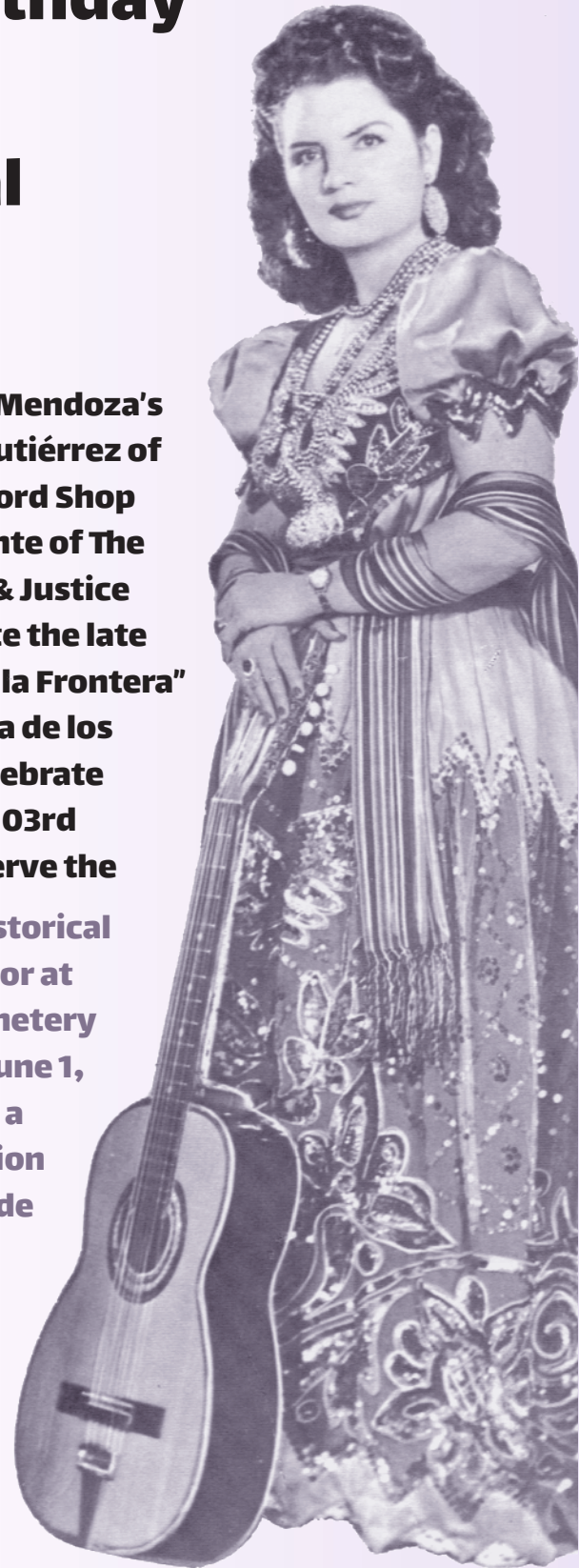
# Lydia Mendoza

## Honored on her 103rd Birthday with an Historical Marker

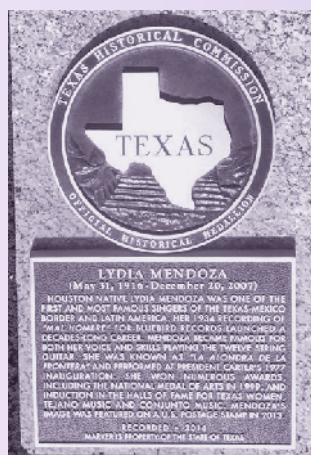
**Join singer Lydia Mendoza's family, Rodolfo Gutiérrez of the Del Bravo Record Shop and the Buena gente of The Esperanza Peace & Justice Center to celebrate the late great "Alondra de la Frontera" aka "La Cancionera de los Pobres", as we celebrate Lydia Mendoza's 103rd birthday and observe the unveiling of an historical marker in her honor at San Fernando Cemetery #2 on Saturday, June 1, 2019, followed by a birthday celebration at the Rinconcito de Esperanza.**

May 31, 1916 -

December 20, 2007







**Houston native Lydia Mendoza was one of the first and most famous singers of the Texas-Mexico border and Latin America. Her 1934 recording of “Mal Hombre” for Bluebird Records launched a decades long career. Mendoza became famous for both her voice and skills playing the twelve string guitar. She was known as “La Alondra de la Frontera” and per-**

**formed at President Carter’s 1977 inauguration. She won numerous awards including the National Medal of Arts in 1999, and induction in the Halls of Fame for Texas Women, Tejano Music, and Conjunto Music. Mendoza’s image was featured on a U.S. postage stamp in 2013. —Text of Historical Marker**

*“Whether I was singing a bolero or a waltz or a polka it didn’t matter... I felt what I was singing. Every song I ever sang I did with the feeling that I was living that song.”*

—2004 NPR interview

Lydia Mendoza, *La Alondra de la Frontera*, was born on May 31, 1916 in Houston, Texas to a family that moved back and forth from Monterrey, Mexico to Texas as her father worked on the railroads and later followed the migrant streams North working in fields and factories. She was born into a musical family with the women playing instruments and singing as far back as her great grandmother. When Lydia was 4 years old, she nailed rubber bands to a piece of wood to create her own instrument to use as she sang. Her mother, Leonora, became her greatest musical influence. At 9 years old Lydia accompanied the family on guitar and when she exhausted her mother’s repertoire of songs she found more songs in the gum wrappers of the time. There she found the lyrics to *Mal Hombre*, the song that made her famous.

By the time Lydia was 12 years old in 1928, she made her first recording in San Antonio, Texas through *Okeh Records* with her family’s group, *Cuarteto Carta Blanca*. For a while the family toured as a variety show in the tradition of *las carpas* following “los trabajos”. From 1928 to 1935 they continued playing for tips in the streets, markets, restaurants and barbershops from Texas to the Midwest and back. Among gente, Lydia became known as *La Cancionera de los Pobres* because she lived the life of the working poor. Through her music she brought validation to lives that might otherwise go unnoticed. In the early 1930s, the Mendozas began performing in San Antonio’s famous *Plaza del Zacate*. Years later in 2001, the Esperanza Center would bring Lydia back to *Plaza de Zacate* to celebrate her 85th birthday.

Lydia’s big break came in 1943 when she won a singing contest on radio that led her family to sign a contract with Bluebird Records. The producers asked Lydia to record some solo cuts including “*Mal Hombre*,” a song about a coldhearted man who breaks his lover’s heart. It became a hit and continues to be an iconic rendition. The Mendozas then began to perform in clubs and theaters. By the time World War II broke out, Lydia had recorded more than 200 songs and would eventually have over

50 LPs to her name. She played the violin and mandolin but the 12-string guitar became her signature instrument. It was rare for a woman to play such a guitar and rarer still for women to sing as a solo performer, but that is how she distinguished herself.

The war slowed Mendoza’s career for a bit. In the late 1940s, married and with children, she returned to recording and performing. Non-Spanish-speaking audiences started discovering her music in the 70s. As her fame spread, she began to be recognized as an American folk icon and was invited to sing at folk festivals and college campuses. In 1988, a stroke again slowed her down.

Lydia’s career spanned over seven decades, but recordings released since her death indicate that her career is still going strong. She has influenced many popular international stars such as Astrid Haddad and Lila Downs (one of Down’s recent CDs, *La Cantina*, emulated the cover of Lydia’s CD, *Mal Hombre* reissued by Arhoolie). Her enormous repertoire of 1,000 canciones: boleros, corridos, danzas, and tangos included ballads about historic figures and songs about hard work, lost love, and the joys of everyday life. In 1971 Mexico, not the U.S., chose Mendoza to represent them in the *Smithsonian Festival of American Folk Life*. Since then she has won numerous awards and recognitions.

Two books that have been written on Lydia include a family autobiography by Chris Strachwitz and Jame Nicolopoulos published by Arte Publico Press (1993) and a bilingual autobiography by Yolanda Broyles González, *Lydia Mendoza’s Life in Music: La historia de Lydia Mendoza* by Oxford Press (2001). Her music has been re-released through *Arhoolie Records*. A film, *Chulas Fronteras*, as well as a play, have been produced about her life.

Lydia Mendoza, with her soulful voice accompanied only by the playing of her 12-string guitar gave a voice not only to gente North and South of the border, but also to Latinos throughout the Western Hemisphere. Her final resting place in San Antonio, Texas will finally have a historical marker of its own. *¡Que viva La Alondra de la Frontera! ¡Que Viva la Cancionera de los Pobres! Lydia Mendoza—¡siempre presente!*

## Unveiling Ceremony

**San Fernando Cemetery #2, 2-4pm  
(746 Castroville Rd.)**

Juan Tejeda, Master of Ceremonies  
Lanier High School Color Guard  
Lanier High School Mariachi  
Las Tesoros with Beatriz Llamas, *La Paloma del Norte* and Blanca Rodríguez, *Blanca Rosa*.

## Birthday Celebration

**Rinconcito de Esperanza, 5-8pm  
(816 S. Colorado St.)**

Music by Belén Escobedo & Ramón Gutiérrez  
Music, food, stories, birthday cake y más