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## FROM THE ARCHIVES

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September 25, 1996

## Nydia Rojas: Her Heart Beats to Mariachi

Pop music: The 18-year-old, whose debut album has been certified Latin gold, is one of the chief attractions at Fiesta Broadway on Sunday.

April 24, 1998 | ERNESTO LECHNER | SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

The future of mariachi has green eyes and goes by the name of Nydia Rojas. The eyes are accompanied by a powerful voice and a proud, passionate sense of her Mexican heritage.

Born in Guadalajara and raised in Los Angeles, the 18-year-old sensation--one of the chief attractions at Sunday's Fiesta Broadway downtown--has come a long way from the days when, at the age of 10, she would sing such classics as "Amorcito Corazon" for the clientele of El Taco Loco, a Mexican restaurant in Hawaiian Gardens.

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"The first time I stood up and sang, the owner of the restaurant hired me on the spot. I went back every Sunday for the next two years," she said last week during an interview at a Studio City coffee shop.

Rojas' restaurant engagements led to a position with a real mariachi orchestra and then to a contract with Arista Records, which released her debut album, "Nydia Rojas," in 1996. The record was certified Latin gold (sales of 50,000), and Arista followed it with "Florecer" last year.

Although mariachi music can appear to be a little repetitive to the novice, Rojas' voice has a distinct musicality and a sweetness in the phrasing that renews even the most tired cliches. And her heartfelt attitude is ideal for singing rancheras, the songs that express the concerns and the longings of rural Mexicans.

Digging Into the Past, Present--and Future

August 11, 1996

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Mariachis

Nydia Rojas

Rojas is busier than usual these days. Besides taking classes at Mt. San Antonio College in preparation for business studies, she is negotiating a record contract that would team her with a major label for the next five years. And there are plans for a Latina version of the Lilith Fair tour that would have Rojas representing the world of mariachi on a stage with pop starlet Shakira, merengue queen Olga Tanón and rock en español priestess Alejandra Guzman.

Although the excellent "Florecer" album flirted with the world of pop, those selections will be absent from her two Fiesta performances on Sunday.

"Pop songs wouldn't really fit on this occasion, since we are celebrating the Cinco de Mayo," she said. "The audience will want to hear my most patriotic songs, like 'Viva Mexico' or 'Volver Volver.' "

But don't expect Rojas to step on stage with a predetermined agenda. "I always keep my performances spontaneous, depending on the mood of the crowd, and the occasional friend that I might spot somewhere in the audience," she explained. "Luckily for me, mariachi musicians are trained to improvise and switch from song to song on the spot."

The mariachi tradition requires a musician to learn hundreds of tunes, a repertoire of classics from which a patron might choose. "When I was singing in the restaurant," Rojas said, "I learned 200 songs in a couple of years. The customers would ask me for a number, and if I didn't know it, I would promise it for the following week. The more songs you knew, the bigger the tip."

It would be easy to imagine Rojas growing up in a house saturated by the sounds of mariachi music. But her mother, Olivia Rojas, tells a different story. "Nydia was the one who brought mariachi to my house, although at first I advised her to sing boleros. Now, of course, we are all in love with mariachi."

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With good reason--Rojas' success has allowed her to combine the musical and the personal.

"As a family, we received a blessing from God," Rojas said. "My career has brought us all together. My mom is my manager, Dad takes care of the business, and my brother is the sound engineer. We travel everywhere together, and we never separate. If you don't have your family to support you in this business, you're dead."

\* Nydia Rojas, Sunday at the AT&T stage and the U.S. Postal Service stage at Fiesta Broadway; also featuring La Mafia, Amanda Miguel, Rudy Regalado, Chayanne, Grupo Niche and others. Downtown, starting at 11 a.m. Free. (310) 914-0015.

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