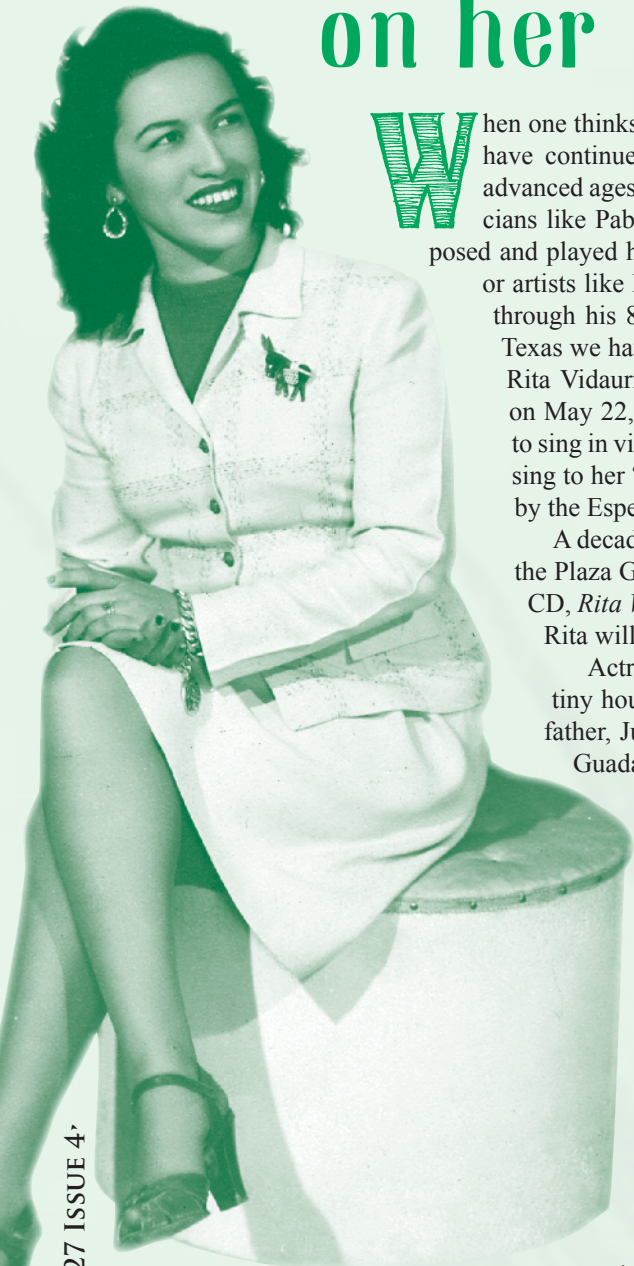


SERENATA A RITA VIDAURRI

on her 90TH BIRTHDAY



When one thinks of elder artists who have continued their careers into advanced ages, one thinks of musicians like Pablo Casals who composed and played his cello into his 90s or artists like Picasso who painted through his 80s. In San Antonio, Texas we have our own treasure, Rita Vidaurri, who will turn 90 on May 22, 2014 and continues to sing in vintage form. Rita will sing to her “querido San Antonio” along with guest performers at a birthday serenata sponsored by the Esperanza on Friday, May 23rd at the Guadalupe Theater.

FRIDAY, MAY 23RD
 @ GUADALUPE THEATER
 1301 GUADALUPE ST. FREE

A decade ago in May 2004, the Esperanza Center celebrated Rita’s 80th birthday outdoors at the Plaza Guadalupe with hundreds of her admirers attending. At that time, Rita released a new CD, *Rita Vidaurri, La Calandria*. She called it her last CD. Not so! As part of her 90th birthday Rita will be releasing a new CD of her favorite songs and jokes!

Actress, musician and businesswoman, Rita Vidaurri was born on May 22, 1924 in a tiny house on San Antonio’s West Side in the 600 block of el Callejón de Montezuma. Her father, Juan Vidaurri, owned a gas station at the corner of Guadalupe and Brazos where the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center now stands. He kept a punching bag in his shop where the dynamic Rita learned to box and work on cars. She attended the local neighborhood school, “La 21,” now J.T. Brackenridge. She also attended Lanier High School.

Her mother, María Jesús “Susie” Castillo, regularly took her to sing at *nuecerías* and *carpas*, popular vaudeville tent shows, like the *Carpa García y La Cubana*. Rita and her sister, Queta, would often perform together for fifty cents in the 1930s during the Golden Age of Mexican vaudeville. Little by little, she and Queta began to tour the small towns of Texas singing. It was then that Rita became known as *La Voz del Campo*. When Queta stopped singing, Rita started taking guitar lessons that her mother paid for at 50 cents a lesson.

Rita’s singing career began at the age of 12 years old when she began to enter singing contests at the Teatro Nacional in downtown San Antonio. When she won first place 18 times, she was asked to stop competing. One of her first big wins was a \$50 prize at a contest sponsored by the H & H Café. In 1938, at age 14, she recorded “*Alma Angelina*” and “*Atotonilco*” on her debut 78 rpm single with her sister for *Bluebird Records*. In lieu of royalties they received furniture for their mother who was to die a year later of TB at age 31. After her mother died, Rita continued to sing but had to work at various jobs including arsenal weapons inspector in later years.

LA VOZ • MAY 2014 VOL. 27 ISSUE 4

Another Year p. 11 cont’d

and the effect of psychotropic medication. They have a lower quality of life, often living in poverty, discrimination and have poorly funded mental health facilities. Of course, the biggest evidence of a lack of right to life is the killing of mentally unstable people by law enforcement.

12

Liberty: Whitley and Henwood write, “The liberty of people with severe

mental illness has always been infringed upon both by their over representation in the jail and prison population and in continued widespread use of involuntary psychiatric institutionalization. Their over-representation is, in large part due to misdemeanors or factors associated with untreated mental illness. Involuntary commitment and institutionalization is also prevalent here. Once a person’s involuntary

inpatient commitment is finished, the same person is then involuntarily sent to an outpatient setting.” Another example is the crime (mental disorder) of child sexual abuse. While I do not believe a child sexual abuser deserves special treatment, they do deserve appropriate treatment. Most abusers are sentenced to prison (not a psych hospital) for years. Then when their time is served, instead of being paroled, they are

By 1941, Rita was a featured singer on José Dávila's popular radio program, *La Hora Anahuac*. One of her earliest supporters, singer-songwriter Lorenzo Barcelata, saw her at the famed Teatro Nacional. He became her padrino giving her his own guitar and her songbird nickname, *La Calandria*, in 1943. Another enthusiastic admirer, Mario Moreno, *Cantinflas*, convinced Rita's father to take her to Mexico City.

There, Rita took the city by storm with actor-comedian, Germán Tin Tan Valdés helping her land a job at *El Patio Nightclub*, the capital's most elite venue. She was billed as *La Última Sensación en Ranchera* and began to share the stage with Jorge Negrete, Pedro Infante, Gloria Marin, Toña La Negra and other stars. Next, Rita appeared in films: *Mexico en la Pantalla*; *Ay, Jalisco, No Te Rajes*; *El Peñon de las Ánimas* and *El Tesoro de Pancho Villa*. This established her as a stage and screen star and helped hone her stage presence incorporating her trademark jokes. If that weren't enough, she entered and won a bathing suit and legs contest in 1946.

Rita became very popular through the mid '40s to the late '50s and became highly sought-after touring all of Mexico, Central and South America and the Caribbean. She also toured Cuba with legends Celia Cruz, *La Reina Azucar*, and Olga Guillot, *Queen of Boleros* as well as with stars, Pedro Vargas, Trío Tiaricuri, Lalo González, *El Piporro* and *Cantinflas*.

In the U.S. Rita performed in New York City with Eydie Gorme and *Trio Los Panchos* and at the famous *Million Dollar Theater* in Los Angeles. In her own hometown of San Antonio, Rita was not as well known even though she was the official Jax Beer Poster girl in 1957.

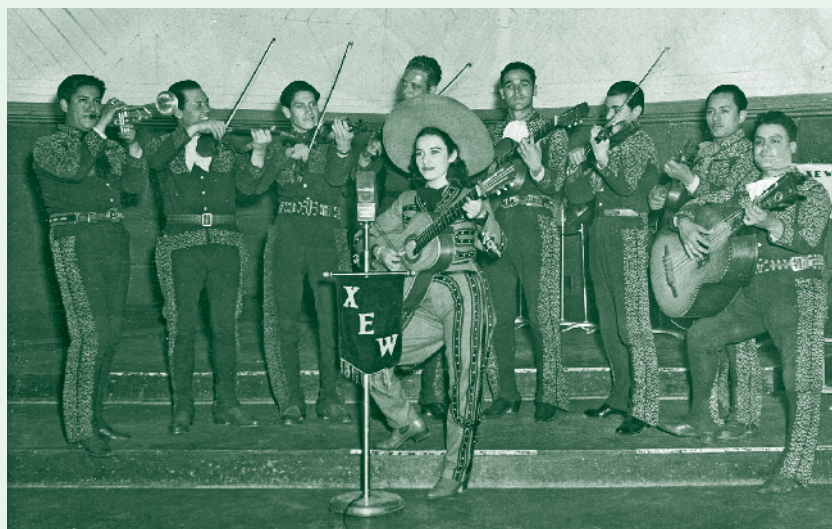
By the early 1960s, Rita gave up her singing and agreed to marry her manager, Hillman Edward Eden, dedicating her life to being his wife and a mother to her three sons, Leo, Rogelio, Eduardo and her daughter, Linda.

Rita reappeared after many years reclaiming her fame when the Esperanza celebrated Lydia Mendoza's birthday in 2001. She sang a song to her comadre, Lydia, on that day and the rest is history. At the time, Rita was working as a home health aid for elders close to the Esperanza Center. Her ties with the Esperanza led to the release of a new CD, "*La Calandria Canta*," fifty years after she had recorded three albums and more than fifty singles in *sus tiempos pasados*.

As Rita entered her 80s, she reignited her singing career as part of Esperanza's *Arte es Vida* program. Her re-entry into the spotlight inspired other elders: Blanca Rodriguez (*Blanca Rosa*), Beatriz Llamas (*La Paloma del Norte*) and Janet Cortez (*Perla Tapatia*) — all returned to the stage singing with Rita in a group called, *Las Tesoros de San Antonio*.

On October 29, 2004, Rita was inducted into the *National*

Hispanic Music Hall of Fame. In 2009, she was honored at Trinity University as part of the music department's *Legends of Texas Border Music Series*. She has now won numerous awards and recognitions. Most recently, she wowed a crowd as she sang at the unveiling of the Lydia Mendoza Commemorative U.S. Stamp. Now revered as a living legend, Rita like other San Antonio legends Eva Garza, Lydia Mendoza, Gloria Rios and Rosita



Fernández, has won a place in our history and in our hearts.

On her 90th birthday Rita will be singing to "mi gente." She will sing with pasión y fuerza. Not the passion of a young woman who is experiencing the innocence and ardor of first love, but the passion of a woman who has experienced a full and complete life that has included the loss of her parents, her husband, a brother, a sister and the death of her three sons — who died as adults, each tragically before their time. When one hears Rita sing *Amor Eterno* — we know that her love is one that transcends the limitations of our earth-bound life. ❖



LA VOZ · MAY 2014 VOL. 27 ISSUE 4

involuntarily committed to a psych hospital — for an indeterminate amount of time.

Pursuit of Happiness:

Depending on the culture, pursuit of happiness can mean many things. In western societies, this means rewarding employment, successful domestic life, community involvement, enjoying hobbies, etc. Sadly, this is not the case for the

mentally ill. Whitley and Henwood write that many of these rights are systematically denied to these people. Homelessness is a problem. Over 35% of the homeless suffer serious mental illness. And, an estimated 80% of those severely mentally challenged are unemployed. This, despite the fact that 70% of the these people want to work. Stigma and discrimination are also factors that affect the pursuit of happiness with

individuals having problems being accepted in churches, clubs and other groups.

Bringing it all home, the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, will help, there will be more assistance for the mentally ill. I just wanted to tell you what is happening this year. See you next May. ❖

Bio: Bill Stichnet, a long-time supporter of Esperanza is retired and living in Hawaii.