

## FACULTY RESEARCH



### **EVA GARZA: FROM EL BARRIO TO BOLEROS**

*By: Deborah Vargas, Assistant Professor Chicano/Latino Studies*

A few summers ago, on one of several research trips to Mexico City, I sat alone in one of the large movie theaters at the Cineteca Nacional, waiting for the archived film *Bolero Inmortal* (1958) to begin. By the magic of cinematic technology, Eva Garza playing the character “Lucha Medina” came to life right before my eyes. There she was on the huge screen, bigger and bolder than I could have ever imagined. Over the course of several days, I was able to screen several movies in which Eva appeared. I recalled the many stories her sister Tina had shared with me about Eva’s dynamic life.

Born on May 11, 1917, on the west side of San Antonio, Eva Garza was the third oldest of seven children. Her entrance into public performance occurred by participating in local singing contests sponsored by radio programs or local theatres. In fact, she was only sixteen when she won a second place prize of \$500 for her rendition of “I’m In the Mood for Love,” at a singing contest held at the Texas Theatre. Eva made her first recordings with Bluebird Records, at recording sessions held at the Texas Hotel in San Antonio. Rhumbas, sons, and boleros such as “La Jaibera,” “Calientito.”

“Qué Me Importa,” and “Me Importa” were among her first songs recorded on October 23, 1936.

Eventually, Eva met Felipe “el Charro” Gil (of Charro Gil y Sus Corporales) while doing a radio show in Juarez, Mexico. Charro, together with brother Alfredo Gil, would form the initial group of what would later become the legendary Mexican Trio Los Panchos. Eva and el Charro settled in New York where she recorded for Columbia Records and often sang for CBS radio shows, including the “Sweetheart of the Americas” radio programs that were aired for the U.S. troops during World War II. During the 1940s and mid-1950s, Eva’s career was solidified with contracts for tours across Latin America and the Caribbean, including Havana, Cuba, Sao Paulo, Brazil, Quito, Ecuador, Bogota, Columbia, and Buenos Aires, Argentina.

In Mexico, Garza would record songs composed by some of the now legendary Mexican songwriters, including Agustín Lara, Gonzalo Curiel and Joaquín Pardavé. Among her gold records were “Celosa,” “Sabor de Engaño,” “Sin Motivo,” “Frio en el Alma,” and “La Última Noche.” She also appeared in various capacities singing, acting, and dancing in over twenty Mexican motion pictures, along side popular singers/musicians of the time—such as Trio Los Panchos, Toña La Negra, Luis Alcaraz, Jose Alfredo Jimenez, Pedro Vargas and Agustín Lara—including, *Si fuera una cualquiera* (1949); *Amor Vendido* (1950); *Arrabalera* (1950); *Cárcel de mujeres* (1951); *Mujeres sin mañana* (1951); *Acapulco* (1951); *Mujeres que trabajan* (1952).

This past September, Professor Raúl Fernández (UCI Department of Chicano/Latino Studies) and I traveled to Havana, Cuba for music research. Thanks to Professor Fernández, I was able to meet and interview some of Cuba’s most notable musicologists, including Helio Orovio, Leonardo Acosta, and Manuel Villar. After finishing an appearance on Havana’s Radio Taino, Raúl reminded me how profound it was that my sharing some of Garza’s music history to listeners of the radio show had occurred in the same building that housed CMQ in the late 1940s, where Garza herself performed some of her most popular boleros.

Eva Garza passed away November 1, 1996, due to complications from heart disease that developed as a result of having acquired rheumatic fever as a child. She is buried in El Pateon Jardin, next to some of Mexico’s most legendary actors and singers. For much too long, Chicana musical contributions, such as Garza’s have been too highly overlooked, misplaced, and under-analyzed, what historian Vicki Ruiz (UCI Departments of Chicano/Latino Studies and History) has referred to as histories of Chicanas remaining in “the shadows” of dominant historical narratives. Based on feminist cultural studies analysis, my book manuscript will fill this huge gap in scholarly attention to Chicana singers of the last century.

*\*This biography excerpt appears courtesy of the newsletter La Voz de Esperanza, Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, San Antonio, Texas.*

## STUDENT NEWS

**Liliana Castaneda Gonzalez**, Spanish and Honors Program in Chicano/Latino Studies, has been accepted to the MA program in Hispanic Literatures in the Department of Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

**Barbara Escobar**, senior, Psychology and Honors Program in Chicano/Latino Studies, has been selected as the House Assistant for Casa Cesar Chavez for the 2008-09 academic year.

**Roberto G. Gonzales**, Ph.D candidate in the Department of Sociology and Research Assistant at the Center for Research on Latinos in a Global Society, was selected by the UCI Alumni Association for the 2008 Lauds and Laurels Award as outstanding graduate student. Mr. Gonzales also published *Wasted Talent and Broken Dreams: The Lost Potential of Undocumented Students* with the Immigration Policy Center in Washington D.C.

**Elizabeth Gutierrez**, Chicano/Latino Studies and Sociology and minor in Educational Studies, has been admitted to the MS program in School Counseling at the University of Southern California.

**Aida Macedo DePartida**, Chicano/Latino Studies and Political Science alumnus, class of '07, has been selected for an 11 month appointment to the California Capital Fellows Program.

**Rodolfo Mondragon**, BA in Chicano/Latino Studies and minors in African American Studies and Educational Studies, has been admitted to the MS program in Higher Education at Iowa State University.

**Wendy Narez**, Honors Program in Chicano/Latino Studies and Honors Program in Political Science, will begin the MA program in Journalism with a concentration on magazine writing at the University of Missouri, Columbia. Wendy is also the recipient of the Thurgood Marshall Fellowship.

**THE CHICANO/LATINO STUDIES STUDENT DEPARTMENTAL SENATE** is a student organization within the Department of Chicano/Latino Studies that seeks to unite undergraduate majors, minors and others taking Chicano/Latino courses.

The Senate serves as a means for empowering students to get actively involved in their educational experience through direct working relationships with their peers and professors.

It's their mission to facilitate the growth of the Department through a network of students and faculty who are able to share knowledge and understanding of the Chicano/Latino experience in the U.S. and abroad.

Departmental Senate meetings are held every Thursday at 4:00 in SST (Social Science Tower) 318. We welcome everyone who is interested in Chicano/Latino Studies Department. You do not need to be a major or



(Top: left to right) Laura Zavala, Fatima Acuna, Liliana Gonzalez, Graciela Arguelles, Jose Flores. Members missing: Heidi Bojorquez, Barbara Escobar, Alejandra Ocasio.

**Mini Graduate Symposium**  
Sponsored by:  
**Center for Research on Latinos in a Global Society**  
January 11 & 18, 2008

**Jody Agius Vallejo**. Sociology. "Brown Picket Fences: Patterns of Giving Back Among the Mexican-Origin Middle Class."

**Lyndsay N. Boggess**. Criminology, Law and Society. "African American and Latino Inter- vs. Intra-Group Youth Violence."



**Armando Ibarra**, Graduate Student in Political Science and Coordinator of Mini-Symposium.

**Brenda Carpio**. Political Science. "Transnational Identity and the Political Consciousness of Second-Generation Mexican-Americans."

**Roberto G. Gonzalez**. Sociology. "Born in the Shadows: The Uncertain Futures of the Children of Unauthorized Migrants."

**Armando Ibarra**. Political Science. "Unauthorized Latino Immigrants in the Deep South: Labor, Politics and Space."

**Rosaura Tafoya-Estrada**. Sociology. "Gendered Educational Incorporation for the Third and Fourth Generation Mexican-Americans."