

EL OBSERVADOR

Latin Women Rock in Music Scene

Ladies break from glamour mold

(AP) — Anyone concerned that traditional machismo would stifle Latin American women who want to rock need look no further than Colombia's Andrea Echeverri and Mexican songstress Ely Guerra.

Their headliner performances at the recent Latin Alternative Music Conference demonstrate that Latina musicians have broken free of the glamour mold that still shapes the images of many female performers.

The Latina rockers evoked a panoply of images: Fringed ponchos and pigtails, elegance with a retro-diva afro. Their videos and lyrics did the same.

The fifth annual conference drew fans, performers and industry insiders to a series of panels, exhibitions and concerts in Los Angeles, New York and Toronto.

Echeverri and Guerra, who performed in a seaside night concert on the Santa Monica Pier, are part of a generation of Latina musicians - among them, the gravelly voiced rocker Alejandra Guzman, the accordion-wielding Julieta Venegas and the seemingly spirit-channeling Lila Downs - who express themselves with a freedom that shatters old ideas of how women "should" behave on stage.



Mexican songstress Ely Guerra is receiving world-wide acclaim for her performance at the Latin Alternative Music Conference.

"We are artists with the heart and mind open," Echeverri said. "I believe that machismo is something from, perhaps, past generations, or of people who still have their minds a bit closed."

Guerra, 32, says it was easier to find artistic acceptance in the United States than in Mexico.

"The people didn't really understand what I was offering when I first began to do this professionally," she said. "And when I came to the United States, well, oddly enough, it was ac-

cepted from the start."

While Guerra says she didn't grow up thinking of herself as beautiful, saying her mother and sisters are far prettier, her looks were something of an initial obstacle in the industry.

"They doubted my professional ability," she said. "In a way, it was a challenge I had to face and carry until I could feel secure in myself, and until everyone else realized that physical beauty and talent aren't in conflict."

Drug Gang Suspect Caught

(AP) — An alleged leader of a powerful drug gang was caught near the border with California, Mexican officials announced Monday, calling it a blow to a syndicate they say is smuggling nearly half the illegal drugs crossing the U.S.-Mexico frontier.

Gilberto Higuera Guerrero was arrested before dawn Sunday at a house in the border city of Mexicali, Attorney General Rafael Macedo de la Concha said at a news conference.

He described Higuera as the "principal operator" for drug boss Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada, whose Mazatlan-based gang is said to be increasing its control of drug trafficking along Mexico's western border with the United States.

"He's practically a legend in drug trafficking," Macedo said.

The U.S. State Department last year offered a \$2 million reward for Higuera's capture, although that was well short of the \$5 million it offered for his alleged bosses at the time - brothers Javier and Eduardo



Attorney General Rafael Macedo de la Concha speaks with the media after he announced at a news conference that a powerful drug gang leader was arrested at a house in Mexicali, across the border from Calexico, Calif. (AP photo)

Arellano Felix of Tijuana.

Macedo said Higuera split with the Arellano Felix gang late last year to join Zambada, and that split

triggered a series of bloody confrontations between the two gangs in the Tijuana area.

Mexican Flag Draws Protest

(AP) — Criticism over a Mexican flag hung in a Denver classroom has led school officials to create a policy that says the display of foreign banners must be temporary and related to what is being taught in class.

Officials at North High School, where the student population is 84 percent Hispanic, said they received complaints over a photograph in the Rocky Mountain News taken on Monday, the first day of school.

The photo showed a Mexican flag displayed in a classroom next to a U.S. flag.

Andrew Fox, who teaches English to Spanish-speaking students, said he wanted his Latino students to feel more welcome.

School superintendent Jerry Wartgow said some people complained there should never be any non-U.S. flags displayed in the schools.

In response to the complaints, school principal Darlene LeDoux removed the Mexican flag and another one displayed in the school's lobby next to a poster of the Statue of Liberty.

Culture Shock Varies for Newcomers

Study finds young assimilate quickly

(AP) — Though Sergio Sanchez came to the United States five years ago, he's struggled to learn English and perform academically. His older brothers, who immigrated when they were young children, are having a much easier time.

"It's difficult to pronounce the words, and people laugh," said Sanchez, 17. "If I were younger, it would be easier."

The difference between Sanchez

and his brothers' experiences is common, according to a study released last week on immigrant youth by the Public Policy Institute of California. It looked at U.S. Department of Labor data on immigrants ages 13 to 24, focusing on Hispanics who make up the majority of this group.

The study of more than 11,000 immigrant youths showed Hispanics who came to the United States at a young age assimilated quickly and demonstrated academic and English fluency levels similar to native-born Hispanic children. But

those who came in their teens face many more problems.

Of those who immigrated before age 10, 33 percent had attended college, compared to 41 percent of native-born Hispanic youths. Of those who arrived later, only 13 percent had attended college.

"We are doing something right because kids who come under the age of 10 are doing almost as well as their native-born counterparts," said Laura Hill, the study's author. "They're in school, and that seems to be associated with good outcomes."

Homeless Killed in Brazil

Groups join forces to protect city's poor

(AP) — Another homeless person was found bludgeoned to death in Rio de Janeiro, South America's biggest city last weekend, the sixth such killing in Sao Paulo within the past several days, police said.

Four other homeless people - three men and a woman - were seriously injured in similar attacks shortly before dawn Sunday.

"The attackers used iron bars or wooden clubs to beat the woman repeatedly in the head and face until she died," police inspector Francisco Pereira said.

The attacks were similar to those last Thursday in which four homeless men were bludgeoned to death and six were injured seriously, Pereira said. All the victims have been 40-50 years old.

One of the six injured died in the hospital last Sunday, city spokesman Jose Roberto Mello said.

Police said they were investigating whether the attacks were a settling of accounts among the homeless themselves or the work of vigilante groups or skinheads. No arrests have been made.

Hundreds of homeless people, including women and children, sleep on Sao Paulo's streets, according to city officials.

During a demonstration held in front of Sao Paulo's Roman Catholic cathedral to protest the killings, Mayor Marta Suplicy decreed three days of official mourning.

"I call on all of you to join forces to defend the homeless," Suplicy told a crowd estimated by police at about 5,000 people. "We must put an end to this distressful situation."

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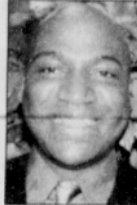
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