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Chile Canta Al Mundo is stunning

BY HECTOR SALDANA : FEBRUARY 8, 2014 : Updated: February 9, 2014 10:34am

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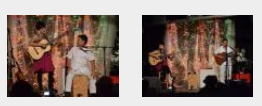
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Saturday night's Chile Canta al Mundo performance with Elizabeth Morris & José Seves.



SAN ANTONIO – Chile's new song – la nueva cancion – found a most welcoming home on Saturday at Esperanza Peace & Justice Center.

At hand were legendary singer-songwriter José Seves and his wife, composer and instrumentalist Elizabeth Morris. Seves is a giant in the history of Chilean music.

Saturday's "Voces Chilenas" concert in the upstairs concert space at the Esperanza (part of a music, lecture and art exhibit collaboration with Trinity University commemorating Chile's 40-year struggle for democracy, social justice and human rights) was at near-capacity with about 150 in attendance.

La nueva cancion arose as political upheaval and bloody military dictators dominated Latin America beginning in the '70s. The folkloric music, often compared to Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan era, went underground after the death of Chile's president Salvador Allende in a coup in Sept. 1973.

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Its spirit is traditional folk music informed with political content and stories about indigenous people.

A second evening concert at the Esperanza, "Cantos Chicanos y Chilenos en California, is set for Feb. 22.

The complete schedule for the ambitious "Chile Canta Al Mundo" series is available online at www.esperanzacenter.org. Events are planned at Trinity and the Esperanza.

Graciela Sanchez, Esperanza executive director, introduced the show. Trinity professor David Spener, who organized the series, made some brief remarks.

"Without the Esperanza, we couldn't have done it," said Spener, speaking in Spanish. As they made their announcements, Seves and Morris could be heard playing and tuning their acoustic instruments, nylon-string guitars and charango, backstage.

The pair received a rousing ovation as they reached the stage around 8:30 p.m.

They opened with Patricio Manns' "El Exiliada Del Sur," trading verses and with Morris taking the solo lines on guitar on the lovely, sometimes dramatic folk song.

The husband and wife duo followed with a Seves song about the original language of the oldest village in Chile, now mostly lost. With its airy chords and chord structure, the song conjured the ancients.



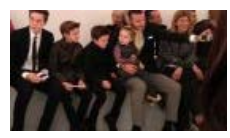
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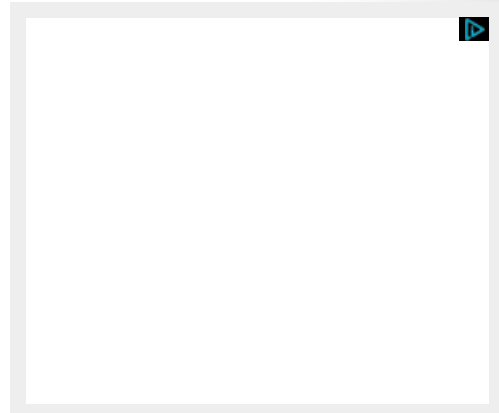
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Morris' "Darte Luz," an early, jazzy composition, revealed an extraordinary range -- in pop terms, an enchanting combination of Norah Jones and Shakira.

The evening really moved when Morris began performing on the high-pitched vihuela and later on charango, among the most enduring symbols of the power and defiance of la nueva cancion.

But there was room for somber tones.

"Sometimes the stories are so sad that they strike me quite personally," Morris explained in Spanish about children separated from their parents in dangerous times.

She then began the softly-picked "Viene Una Carta." Its wide-ranging melody recalled Joni Mitchell; its intensity matched Suzanne Vega's best. Seves added notes played on wooden flute.

"Canto De La Estrellas," an emotional homage to Chilean nueva cancion martyr Victor Jarra recorded by Seves' Inti-Illimani in 1996, was stunning. Morris played the 10-string charango and also a box drum.

Jarra, a poet, educator and songwriter, became a symbol of Chile's fight human rights after he was tortured and murdered by the military in Sept. 1973.

In a lighter moment, Morris talked about the start of her love affair and partnership with Seves. Symbolic, for the pair, was the song-poem "Velorio de un Negro Criollo," written by the black Peruvian poet and musician Nicomedes Santa Cruz, who was most influential in the 1950s, '60s and '70s.

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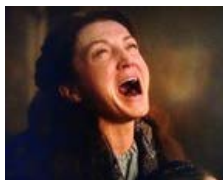
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