

Out of Mexico: Beautiful Art and Music Show a Different Side of Life South of the Border

Originally published October 6, 2012

In the last five or ten years, most of my perceptions of Mexico have been shaped by the grotesque and frightening stories surrounding the trafficking of illegal drugs in the country on America's southern border.

If you read newspapers, watch television news, or hear news on the radio, you also have heard those stories about Mexico being the illegal drug capital of North America and the city of Juarez becoming the murder capital of the world as a result of drug gangs fighting for dominance over the city across from El Paso.

It is an ugly and even barbaric picture that various media have painted.

However, over the last two weeks I have seen a different picture of Mexico and Juarez in the art of Fernando de Anda and in the music of Carlos Benitez, both residents of Juarez and emissaries of their country.

In their paintings and songs, both men have brought expressions of the beauty that is obviously and abundantly present in their country. In their personal lives and stories they demonstrate how the people of Mexico excel in art and music, two of the highest expressions of our humanity.

Fernando de Anda and Carlos Benitez were born in Juarez, but both of them have traveled and lived in different parts of the world.

De Anda went to primary school and secondary school in Ciudad Juarez. He went on to study art for two years at the Academy of Art in San Carlos, Mexico. Then from 1980 to 1983 he

studied and worked at the Gerrit Rietveld School of art in Amsterdam, Holland.



Pete Mladinic and Joe Byers, LCM Board of Directors members, visit with artist Fernando DeAnda

De Anda has had his drawings and illustrations appear in a number of publications, such as monographs, magazines, and books, including "Matematica y Vida" and "Historia Grafica de la Revolucion Mexicana."

De Anda has had exhibitions of his art in Merida, Yucatan, Cancun, San Cristobal las Casas, San Antonio, Texas, Santa Teresa, New Mexico, Phoenix, Arizona, and of course in El Paso and Ciudad Juarez.

Carlos Benitez, who plays classical guitar, was raised in Cd. Juarez. He began his musical studies in Libertad Montelongo music school where he studied with the renowned musician and teacher Aquiles Valdez.

Benitez then received a scholarship to study music in California with another well known teacher, Pepe Romero at the University of San Diego. He has taken many master classes under several renowned guitarists, including David Russell and Javier Chamico.

His compositions have been published in numerous magazines, including “Puente Libre,” and he has been published in the book “12 Modern Mexicans.”

Benitez has performed around the world, including Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Italy, the United States, and of course in his home country of Mexico.



Classical guitarist, Carlos Benitez

He works in Juarez today as a guitar instructor, a composer, and a concert performer.

The visual and musical art of these two men is just as impressive as their resumes.

De Anda’s paintings show a wide range of subject matter and of style. In his works can be found scenes from rural life in contemporary Mexico and life as it was experienced in the the American West of the 1800s. Some of his drawings are incredibly realistic, while others border on the abstract.

The songs de Anda played at his Lovington concert on Friday, Sept. 28, were all formal classical guitar compositions, but they ranged from the lively to the subdued, from the martial to the romantic.

To me, several of the songs seemed heavily romantic, perhaps due to the presence in the audience of his girlfriend and traveling companion Gabriella Carerra who lives and works in El Paso.

Though both men were in Lovington for the Lea County Museum’s “Cultural Bridges” programs, De Anda and Benitez have not met before, de Anda being approximately 20 years older. It might be that for both of them, reading this History Notebook will serve as an introduction to each other.

Both of the men have very unassuming, cordial personalities, and open personalities. They make excellent ambassadors of Mexico. I heard one Lea County resident say that if everything in Mexico were as beautiful as the art and music of these two men, there would be more Americans moving to Mexico.

The people who attended Fernando’s art opening and Carlos’ concert did express a great deal of admiration and gratitude for the two men coming to Lovington, with several telling them that the people of the town and of Lea County would enjoy seeing them return to Southeast New Mexico.

De Anda and Benitez came here with the help of the office of the Mexican Consulate in Juarez and through the efforts of Father Manuel Ibarra of St. Thomas Catholic Church in Lovington. Father Manuel and Peter Mladinic, a museum board member, were the prime movers in putting on all the “Cultural Bridges” programs at the Lea County Museum.