

Interweave Connect

LGBTQ Youth

September 2013

Dear Interweave members and friends,

Interweave Continental invites each of you to plan ahead NOW for a special fundraising activity that expresses your congregation's support of Interweave Continental and of the LGBTQ community. Our vision is that part of the funds raised would provide for your congregation's membership in Interweave Continental (\$100) and part would support a particular Interweave Continental project of your choice.

For example, help to send a youth to Camp Aranu'tiq, a one-week summer camp for transgender and gender-nonconforming youth ages 8 through 15. Read about this camp in this issue of Interweave Connect (p2) and be inspired. We would love to make it possible for a youth from one of our congregations to attend Camp Aranu'tiq. With your help, we can fulfill that wish.

UU LGBTQ persons in prison have requested copies of Interweave Connect, but our newsletter is electronic and as such is unavailable to them. The newsletter is expensive to print out and mail to the LGBTQ persons who are seeking our support. Your congregation might choose to support this LGBTQ prison ministry project.

Your fundraising activity could be as simple as a movie-discussion night that starts with a potluck dinner. Such a gathering is sponsored each month by the Interweave Group at the UU Church of Eugene. Nisco Junkins has much experience organizing this event and could help you to choose an inspiring film for your group. Or you might arrange to have one of your congregation's Sunday collections be designated to this membership-service project. Directly soliciting donations is another option. If ten people donate \$10, your congregation already has the funds for membership in Interweave Continental. Your fundraiser could be conducted at your church in honor of National Coming Out Day in October or Transgender Day of Remembrance in November.

We invite you to use your imagination about how you might raise the funds to have your congregation join Interweave Continental and directly support one of its special projects. With your help, we will send a youth to summer camp and reach out to LGBTQ UUs in prison who want our newsletter.

Thank you in advance for your investment in this project. Let us hear from you regarding your ideas and plans for a fundraising event! Let us all learn and be inspired from the plans that you make! We look forward to your input!

All good wishes,
Maryka Bhattacharyya
President, Interweave Continental

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Interweave Connect Mission Statement

Interweave Connect offers a network of communication that fosters the spiritual well-being and social responsibility of LGBTQA individuals and their Unitarian Universalist congregations.

The Interweave Continental Board welcomes your articles for Interweave Connect. All articles will be given consideration for printing in our newsletter. Please note that members of the Interweave Connect staff reserve the right to edit all articles.



Nick Teich, LCSW, Founder and President, is a seasoned camper and camp professional, a social worker, and is currently pursuing a PhD in social policy. He has interest in working toward transgender rights. Click here to see Nick interviewed Nick Teich, LCSW,

The first time I knowingly met a transgender child was in 2007 on a summer cruise for GLBT families. In fact, I met two of them, and they had only just met each other that week. I was struck by how comfortable they felt together, but I knew that they didn't feel comfortable in most places. The cruise was a refuge. At school they dealt with constant bullying from teachers and students alike. Watching these kids play together on the cruise was a picture I kept in my mind long after I returned home.

Less than two years later, the idea of Camp Aranu'tiq was born. It is a weeklong overnight camp that had its first week in August 2010. This summer is our third, and we have expanded to have one week in August in New England and one week in July in California. We served over 100 youth during these two weeks in 2012. Aranu'tiq's focus is simple: give transgender and gender-variant youth ages 8 through 15 a week of fun and friends with whom they can keep in touch. The importance of the experience is allowing a camper to be with others who are going through what that child is going through. The week is about those great camp activities and lots of bonding time with each other.

I feel that educating others is extremely important. In my quest to do this, I authored a book that was just released a few months ago entitled *Transgender 101: A Simple Guide to a Complex Issue* [website: www.transgender101.com] (Columbia University Press,

2012). It is aimed at a very wide audience, particularly people who need an introduction to the subject. In it, I cover a lot of transgender-related issues that many people wonder about but might be afraid to ask.

I have been a camper all my life. After 13 summers as a camper, counselor, and camp leader, I moved on to the "real world," but I missed camp terribly. It seemed to me that transgender children would be hard pressed to find a summer camp that would let them be who they are. Gender-variant children who may not identify completely as female or male would certainly be deprived of the overnight camp experience.

As an adult I began to volunteer at a weeklong charitable camp. After several years of involvement, I was told I would not be able to return because I was transgender. It was personally devastating and utterly confusing for me. I thought, if this can happen to me as an adult, what about kids who are turned away from camps because of their gender identity? Then I thought back to the cruise and how pivotal it was for those two transgender children.

This all led to my creation of Camp Aranu'tiq, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Our board of directors consists of community members who are therapists, teachers,



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What does the name “Aranu’tiq” mean? Aranu’tiq is a Chugach (Yup’ik, an Indigenous people of Alaska) word for a person who was thought to embody both the male and female spirit. Aranu’tiq people were often revered and thought to be very lucky because their existence transcended traditional gender boundaries

a “camp guru,” and a mother of a camper. We are the first camp in the world to cater to transgender and hendervariant youth.

Transgenderism and gender variance affects families of all colors, creeds, religions, etc. We keep camp tuition lower than most other camps and rely heavily on the generosity of individual donors. For those families that cannot afford the tuition as it is, we offer need-based financial aid and even cover airfare for some campers in need.

We have campers from 36 states and two foreign countries. Because confidentiality is of the utmost importance for our camp population, we never reveal the location of camp. Aranu’tiq is still an all-volunteer operation, from the top down. Our camp counselors are adult volunteers of all backgrounds who have

given up a week (or sometime two, for those who are counselors at both our camps) to help give our campers a wonderful experience.

What some of our campers said in response to the question, “What are some things you learned at Aranu’tiq?”, “I learned that I’m not alone and that I’m not the only one.” “The most important thing that other campers have taught me is that I’m not alone and there are always people I can turn to.”, “I learned to be more confident.”, “Other campers taught me to be more ok with myself.”, I learned that I have confidence in myself.”, “I’m ME and no one can change that.”, “There are actually people that I can be myself around without feeling self-conscious that I am trans.”



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The Multicultural Ministries Sharing Project

Have you heard about the groundbreaking Multicultural Ministries Sharing Project? The UUA is seeking insight from people within Unitarian Universalism who are LGBTQ, people with disabilities, people of color, or otherwise marginalized around race, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity/expression.

The Multicultural Ministries Sharing Project consists of a comprehensive survey, and later, focus groups, to help congregational leaders and UUA staff understand where we are now and what we need to be well-equipped to meet the ministry needs of UUs in the 21st century.

We need your help! Take the survey and spread the word! All those 13 and older with a UU affiliation who are LGBTQ, people of color, people with disabilities, or otherwise marginalized due to gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, race, and/or ethnicity are warmly invited to participate. The Sharing

Project survey is open now and ends October 31, 2013. Click here to take the survey:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/UUAMMSP>

If you or someone you know is unable to take the online survey and/or would prefer an alternate format, please contact Alex Kapitan, akapitan@uua.org, (617) 948-6461, 25 Beacon St., Boston MA, 02108.

All best,

Alex Kapitan

LGBTQ and Multicultural Programs Administrator

Multicultural Ministries

Unitarian Universalist Association

25 Beacon Street

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www.uua.org/lgbtq



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Time to start thinking, AWARDS!

Each year, Interweave Continental presents two awards at our Interweave Continental Banquet during General Assembly. One is the Mark DeWolf award and the other is the sermon award.



The 2013 winning sermon, "Spaces Between: A Theology of Rainbows," was written and presented by Caitlin S. Cotter, a seminarian at the Starr King School of Ministry

The Mark DeWolfe Award is given to a Unitarian Universalist who has substantially contributed to improving the lives of LGBTQ people, whether in or outside of a UU setting. The award was established to honor the memory of the Rev. Mark DeWolfe who was the first, openly gay minister to serve a Unitarian Universalist congregation.

The second award is for the best sermon that addresses LGBTQ issues and concerns. Sermons must have been preached before a UU congregation or



Activist and community builder Larry Duane Kitchen received the 2013 Mark DeWolfe Award at Interweave's annual banquet.

in a seminary setting between April 1 of the previous year and April 1 of the year of the GA banquets.

There is a \$250 prize for each award. Now is the time for us to think about who would be the right person for the Mark DeWolfe award and the sermon award. Is there someone in your congregation who has made a difference in the lives of LGBTQ people? Have you heard a sermon about LGBTQ issues and concerns that really hit home? Please help Interweave Continental, and let us know who you wish to nominate and why.

Thanks!

\$50 Amazon Gift Card Drawing

We want your input! Interweave recently received a grant from UU Funders to support our membership efforts. As a first step, all 1,100 UU congregations will receive an 8-question assessment asking what Interweave can do to better serve you.

The first 50 to return the questionnaire will be entered for a chance to win a \$50 Amazon gift card. If you have not received the assessment questionnaire by September 30, please contact Susan Gore at sgoretx@aol.com.

Your congregation does not have to be a current Interweave chapter member to participate. We want to hear from everyone!

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LGBTQ at First Parish in Bedford

I have attended First Parish in Bedford throughout all 19 years of my life, and have found it to be the most open-minded, open-armed, and open-mouthed place I've ever been. Open-minded as in, 'Yes, of course we can be surprised by something new and different, but that's just another way in which we can learn about it and appreciate it for all that it is.' Open-armed as in, 'Yes, we are all different, but here's a place where we can come together and be comfortable and safe and part of something important with each other.' Open-mouthed as in, 'Yes, we all have our own ideas and questions and opinions and by God or Neptune or George or whoever, we're going to put it out there and make sure we are heard! In addition to hearing what everyone else has to say, of course...'

And growing up in a place like this certainly has quite an impact on an energetic, curious, sharp young mind – of which we're lucky to have so many. I was raised in a place where I was taught that everything and everyone new was an opportunity to learn about and incorporate new ideas into my view of the world. I'm proud that Unitarian Universalism offers an education based around values such as acceptance, love, interconnectedness, and dignity, and I feel lucky that I had it. Although such an education is becoming less and less unique in our society, for which I'm also incredibly proud, I know that some of my opinions and ideas are different from friends, family, and peers who were raised in a different mindset.

One of the largest disparities I've come across has to do with "differentness;" in other words, how I approach persons or people that are in some way different than I am. My UU education taught me not only to accept others, but also to recognize

and respect the inherent worth and dignity of every individual. Perhaps it is with these principles, or with ideas I've picked up along the way, that I consider things like the LGBTQ Community.

When I discover that someone has a different sexual preference or gender identity than I do – I happen to be straight, so that would mean gay, transgender, etc. – I do not automatically group them into the "LGBTQ Community" in my mind. I do not think, 'Oh, I'm talking to a gay person.' Instead, I think 'The person I'm talking to is gay.' This may seem like a trivial difference at first, but to me it means much more than just a reorganization of words. I consider gender and sexuality, along with race, religion, and other such topics not as what a person is, but rather a part of who that person is. I do not mean to minimize the importance of the role that such topics play in the composition of one's identity, nor the organization of support or interest groups based on such topics. I mean to show that one's gender and sexuality does not define that person in my eyes, and I attribute that to my UU upbringing.

I know that my ideas are not the same as those of everyone in this church (isn't it beautiful to be able to say that?), and growing up here is different from attending as an adult. I admit that I'm not aware of much of what goes on in the sanctuary, as I've spent a large majority of my time here in R.E. classrooms. However, I can say with certainty that something I value most in this church is our incessant acceptance, not of "other" people or "those" people, but of each and every person. Growing up in this place has taught me that we are not separate from them, but that we, everyone, are all together, and that we are all individually important for who we find ourselves to be. This attitude has followed me out the doors of this church, and has stuck with me as I "take on the world," as they say. And I am very grateful for it. Thank you.

Tessa Rosenberry
First Parish in Bedford, MA



Interweave Connect

Outreach in Eugene, OR

On August 8, 2013, the article, "Allies for Equity," appeared in the *Eugene Weekly*. It was written by Adrain Black. Black interviewed LGBTQ high school students and youth outreach workers. Among them was Julie Heffernan, a member of the UU Church of Eugene, OR.

When Phoebe Wihtol was in the eighth grade, she came out to her family, friends and classmates. She is now a junior at South Eugene High School and a member of South Eugene's GayStraight Alliance (GSA). She, like other LGBTQ youth needed a supportive place where they could gather together. "What we want it to be is a safe, welcoming environment where, no matter what, we're going to accept you," says Onyx Huch, GSA president.

According to Carmen Urbina, who is a parent and diversity coordinator at 4J School District, LGBTQ students "have a higher probability of not feeling safe in schools." A recent school climate survey supports this statement. Current data indicates that average coming-out age is around fifteen.

Although Wihtol is relatively comfortable being out, not all LGBTQ-identified students are. She, Huch and Urbina, hope that will change through GSAs and other initiatives. "It's about them not having to deny who they are in our schools," Urbina says.

Since their freshman year, both Wihtol and Huch have been friends and members of GSA. They have been active in educating other youth about LGBTQ issues and concerns. For example, Huch, who is bisexual, sat on a Bridges Panel at Spencer Butte Middle School. The speaking event was designed to help younger students learn about LGBTQ youth.

According to Wihtol, LGBTQ education should begin as early as possible. "If we only teach it at puberty, that makes it weird. Little kids know heterosexuality. They see a prince kiss a princess in

movies. You tell little kids about gay people the same way you tell them about straight people."

Julie Heffernan is an education studies instructor at the University of Oregon and former social studies teacher at North Eugene High School. She facilitates LGBTQ education panels and discussions in numerous schools throughout Eugene.

Heffernan points out that gender identity and sexual orientation are confusing to children. "Gender identity is interpreted by kids as sexual orientation in about the first grade," Heffernan says. "The two are tied together immediately in harassment and hostility." Male-to-female transgender children, for example, are often incorrectly labeled as gay by their classmates. "Whether a kid is attracted to their own birth gender or not is irrelevant to how they do or don't conform to that gender," she explains.

"We had a whole elementary school go through a whole year of training over that," Urbina says about an assumed male second grader who consistently identified as female. Schools have taken steps to accommodate transgender students, such as providing gender-neutral bathrooms. South Eugene has only one gender-neutral bathroom, "and it's not always open," Wihtol says. South's GSA, with Urbina's help, plans to tackle that problem this fall. "A lot of the more active members in the GSA are trans," Wihtol says. "We're in the process of trying to turn GSA from being 'Gay-Straight Alliance' to 'Gender-Sexuality Alliance,' because that covers the whole [LGBTQ] spectrum."

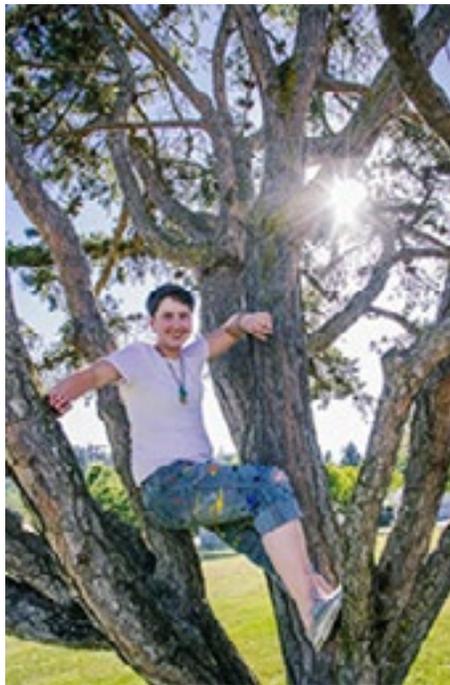
According to Huch, "GSAs are a place that's about equity, not equality." "Equality is where everyone gets a parachute — same model, same size. Equity means everyone gets a parachute that fits."

To read the original article, go to <http://www.eugeneweekly.com/20130808/lead-story/allies-equity>.

Thank you to Laura Philips for sending this information to *Interweave Connect*.

IT GETS BETTER PROJECT

[Click here](#)



Adrain Black

Interweave Connect



OUTreach Resource Center at UU

UTreach Resource Center not only provides a safe space for youth, but it also provides an opportunity for at-risk LGBTQ youth and allies to achieve their potential as educated, healthy, happy leaders who are engaged and active in their community. Research studies and personal stories confirm that youth who are at risk are less likely to attend school, graduate, or attend college (due to bullying). In addition, at risk youth are more likely to engage in unsafe behaviors, such as smoking, drug or alcohol use, and unhealthy, premature sexual activity. At risk youth tend to have lower self-esteem. In addition, there is a higher incidence of depression and an increase in suicide.

Ogden OUTreach is the second center in the state of Utah to provide a safe and supportive environment for LGBTQ youth (sadly, there are only two). However, Ogden OUTreach also offers quality programming and

services designed to help youth survive and thrive. When we say "we work to save lives," we mean exactly that!

OUTreach Resource Center provides educational, health and enrichment opportunities and support for 350 LGBT and allied youth ages 14-23 as well as community services for LGBT and allied adults. Our projects include: Safe and Sound host homes for homeless youth, homeless youth resources, family strengthening and reunification services, community education, suicide and bullying prevention, Utah Safe Schools Coalition and the "Make it Better Now Utah!" Project.

The Center is open for youth ages 14-23 from 3:00 - 7:30 p.m. Wednesdays and Thursdays in the lower level of the Unitarian Universalist Church, 705 23rd Street, Ogden.

What is OUTreach up to?

These are our primary areas of focus - be a part of making it better for LGBT youth in your community and throughout Utah. Can't volunteer, but want to help? Your donations mean the world to LGBT youth - every dollar counts! Please consider a tax deductible donation today..

LGBT Youth Support Groups

Need one in your community? Want to volunteer at a satellite support group for youth? We are assessing needs and available volunteers and need your help wherever you live! Email or call us: info@ogdenoutreach.org or 801-686-4528

Want to help? Be part of making it better for LGBTQ youth in your community and throughout Utah. Can't volunteer, but want to help? Your donations mean the world to LGBTQ youth - every dollar counts! Please consider a tax deductible donation today.



Youth Homelessness

Safe and Sound has a new program director who is setting the world on fire! Check out the new facebook page and the website, safeandsoundutah.org. Watch for a special newsletter article next week and learn more about how you can help keep LGBTQ youth from a life on the streets and keep families loving and strong.

Rev. Theresa Novak Minister
UU Ogden<, UT

Interweave Connect

Every Week at OUTreach is full!

It's the final fun days of summer!
Join us at OUTreach where it's always cool to be who you are and supported in becoming the person you want to be!

Claymation / Stop Motion Video Workshop

Learn something new and have a blast!
Breakdance Claymation



Class and Discussion: Being Bi What IS bisexuality, anyway?

"Bisexuality means I am free and I am as likely to want to love a woman as I am likely to want to love a man, and what about that? Isn't that what freedom implies?"
- June Jordan



Anti Bullying

Join in an informative talk and discussion about Being Bi!



Insider Freshman Tips!

Going to College? Hurray! What to bring, what NOT to wear, what to expect, and how to avoid the freshman 15!

Alliance Meeting!

School is about to start, communities from all over are asking for help and resources...ABA is getting ready!

Yummy Dinner! Evelyn and her crew are back from vacation...we love you!

MTG - bring your deck! Don't have one? We have some you can borrow! Don't know how to play? We will teach you!

and...S'more Support Group!

Plus - free counseling with Dr. Ambrose and Dr. Kay, pool, ping pong and foosball, lending library or books and movies, mentoring, educational and employment resources, cyber-center, and more!

Jackson's Secrets to Success! Part Four...



Law Enforcement, Bullying, and YOU

How can your resource officer help prevent bullying? And what to do when you are outside of school and feel unsafe.



Picnic and Games in the Park!

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Unity Church at the state capital working on Marriage Equality

The mostly white Unity Church Unitarian is located on the edge of a racially diverse neighborhood. Here is a brief outline of how we and our work for racial justice developed in the hopes that others may find this helpful.

The board, ministers and staff had a strong calling to address racial justice issues. An Anti-Racism Leadership Team (ARLT) was formed that reports directly to our Board of Trustees and the initial project of this team was to complete an historical racial audit of Unity Church-Unitarian. Several intense trainings through the Minnesota Collaborative Anti-racism Initiative (MCARI) were offered to congregants, board members, staff and ARLT team members. We looked at several projects locally and nationally that were successful in community outreach. Many of these projects had a “listening” or “storytelling” component.

So, a group was formed who went out into our diverse neighborhood with the purpose of listening to our neighbors concerns and dreams. This work took several years. During this time, the Racial Justice Outreach Ministry Team was formed. Most of the people on the team had been on ARLT or had gone through the training.

- We acknowledged that we had much to learn and that we had been socialized to think about race in a certain way. Group boundaries were developed that made it safe to talk about our own discomfort, questions, and reactions to outreach events or comments said in meetings. In this way, we could challenge each other and support our own spiritual growth.
- We knew we needed to learn more about racism and racial issues. Members took turns bringing a

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relevant reading, and we had a group discussion about each one.

- We planned outreach activities along with neighborhood Baptist Churches (which were mostly Black) and other neighborhood White churches. The other churches were vital to the planning process. The initial contacts came through our ministers, but as the project formed, so did more relationships.
- We continued to look at social justice issues in order to find where we might advocate politically. In the process, we discovered that there were issues that we had to confront.

There were the differences in religions among the churches with which we initially partnered. Some community partners embraced us, but some from both White and Black Churches struggled with our Unitarian beliefs. The Unitarians had to get used to starting meetings with a prayer! There were differing views on social policies, such as LGBTQ issues. Some Black churches also expressed a disinterest

in talking about race. From their perspective, they had done that before and were not interested in more “conversation.” Most of us, from all the churches, were able to set some of these differences aside and focus on building relationships.

Examples of what we have done:

One of our members did some fundraising to bring an interfaith, interracial gospel choir “Shades of Praise” from New Orleans to our community. They sang in three churches. There was a community meal and discussion after the concerts. This was jointly planned and executed among many churches including Unity Church.

Out of this, our group decided to have a float in a neighborhood parade and we called it the “Faith Float.” Many community churches were involved and church members sang spirituals as well as songs related to the Civil Rights Movement. The singing continued along the parade route that went through



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the predominately African American neighborhood in St Paul. The collaborative effort lasted for four years.

As we have had these experiences, we kept learning and at times felt the need for more dialogue within our own church. There were moments when we had not been sure about how to proceed and we spent time reflecting. We gathered information about local organizations that were also doing this work and we wondered if they could possibly be partners with us. It is hard to build relationships across race and sometimes class!

For the last three years, we have led a “Congregation Read” in February. The first year, we chose fiction: Family by J California Cooper. We gave congregants a month to read it and then led two book discussion groups. We always choose Black authors and look at what the local Friends of the Library and the Givens Foundation is recommending. With a little on-line investigation, we are often able to find discussion questions and then tailor them, adding questions about how what we learned informs our faith and guides us as Unitarians.

This year, was the most powerful of the book reads. It was The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander. We advertised our book read in the local community and had over 100 people come between the two discussion groups. (The UUA also adopted

this book, and there are study guides on their website and a video of her speech at GA) .

As a result of reading The New Jim Crow, our Racial Justice Ministry Team has joined the Restorative Justice Ministry Team to work together on a very long list of social justice issues around incarceration. We are developing a plan for advocacy, service and learning that will supply us with direction for many years.

I am not sure where we are headed, I have had to become “OK” with not always having a plan, just putting one foot in front of the other and keeping an open heart about where this will lead us.

I do think the most important things we learned are to listen carefully to those who are oppressed by racism. We need to bring a curious mind to the work, and we need to continue to question our own prejudices. Also, we need to realize that affecting change can be slow. The foundation for the work is relationships and conversations both within and outside of our Church.

Sincerely,

Terri McNeil
member of Unity Church Unitarian



Interweave Connect

Chavela Vargas

(April 17, 1919 – August 5, 2012)

Last month was the one year anniversary of the death of Chavela Vargas, a musician from Mexico. She was ninety-three. You do not need to speak Spanish to appreciate her songs. You just need to listen and you will understand.

Chavela Vargas was famous for her renditions of Mexican rancheras. Ranchera was a style of music sung by men with a mariachi band. It was the male perspective of love and rejection, of longing and desire for a woman. Before Chavela, rancheras were only performed and recorded by male artists. Chavela sang these songs accompanied by guitar without changing the gender pronouns. She sang to and about women with emotional intensity. Her voice, expressing pain and anguish, has been described as “la voz apera de la ternura” (the rough voice of tenderness).

In addition to ranchera, Chavela is known for her contribution to other genres of Latin American music. In 2007, the Latin Academy of Recording Arts and Science presented her with a Lifetime Achievement Award and the Latin Grammy.

Chavela Vargas was born on April 17, 1919 in Costa Rica. She was the daughter of Francisco Vargas and Herminia Lizano. Although she was given the name Isabel Vargas Lizano at birth, she preferred to be called Chavela.

According to her autobiography, *Y si quieres saber de mi pasado* (And if you want to know about my life), Chavela had an unhappy childhood. Her parents divorced, and she was raised by an uncle. At the age of fourteen, Chavela left Costa Rica and migrated to Mexico where she later obtained national citizenship.

Chavela had a passion for music and Mexico, at the time, provided numerous opportunities. Also, Mexico was more liberal than Costa Rica. In Mexico, Chavela, dressed in men’s clothing, sang on the streets for many years. Near the end of the 1950s, when Chavela was thirty, she became a professional singer. In 1961, her first album, “Noche de Bohemia” (Bohemian Night) was released. Chavela was now a very successful musician.



However, in the late 1970s, Chavela became semi-retired. She was struggling with alcoholism. In her biography, she described it as her “fifteen years in hell.” She also said that an Indian family, who didn’t

know that she was famous, took care of her and helped her to stop drinking.

Chavela regained popularity because the Spanish director, Pedro Almodovan, began using her singing voice in his films. In 1991, Chavela performed on stage in Mexico City. Soon, she was once again a successful musician, performing in Latin America, Europe and the United States. By now, Chavela was in her seventies.

In the year 2000 at the age of eighty-one, Chavela stated on Columbian television that she was a lesbian. This announcement was not a surprise to many people. Chavela wore men’s clothes, smoked cigars, rode motorcycles and carried a gun. In addition, she was notorious for flirting with women in her audiences.

One of the songs that Chavela was most noted for singing was “Macorina.” It describes a woman’s slender waist, her breasts and her mouth. When Chavela sang the song with the refrain “put your hand

here ...," she stared at a woman in the audience, and placed her own hand between her legs, touching her crotch. Here are some of the words:

Macorina

Ponme la mano aqui, Macorina
Ponme la mano aqui.

Despues el amanecer
Que demis brazos te lleva
Y you sin saber que hacer
De aquel olor a mujer
A mango y cana nueva
Con que me llevaste al son
Caliente de aquel danzon.

Put your hand here, Macorina
Put your hand here.

Then the dawn
That takes you from my arms
And I not knowing what to do
With that woman scent
Like mango and new cane
With which you filled me at
The hot sound of that dance.

When she was in her thirties, Chavela socialized with numerous artists. Among them were the painter Frida Kahlo and her husband, muralist Diego Rivera. Chavela lived with the couple for a few years. It was rumored that Chavela and Frida had been lovers while Frida was married.



In 2003, Chavela performed at Carnegie Hall at the age of eighty-three. More recently in 2011, she produced the album, "La Luna Grande." It was a tribute to the Spanish poet, Federico Garcia Lorca. A few weeks after she traveled to Madrid, Spain to perform "La Luna Grande," Chavela died.



Chavela Vargas died August 5, 2012 in Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico. She had been admitted to the hospital for heart and respiratory problems. According to reports, Chavela asked to have her oxygen mask removed so she could say a few last words ... "Me voy con Mexico en mi corazon." (I'm leaving with Mexico in my heart.)

I have visited Mexico many times, but I did not know anything about Chavela Vargas until last year, after her death. If I had, I would have gone to her performances. Being in her presence would have been an amazing experience for me. I am, however, thankful that I have discovered her music.



Sitting in solitude, I have looked at her picture and I have listened to her singing. Her voice and her face live in my heart. Chavela Vargas, the musician, the woman whom I have never met, has become an intimate friend. Buenas noches, amiga.

Vargas, Chavela. (2002). *Y si quieres saber de mi pasado*, ed. J.C. Vales, (2nd ed.).

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