

Yolanda Perez Blends Traditional Urban Sounds

Written by Leila Cobo ID2035

Sunday, 23 October 2005 14:34 -

Although Yolanda Perez is not the first bilingual, bicultural artist to blend traditional Mexican with urban American sounds, she may have an edge over her competitors. Unlike most of her counterparts, she is female and, judging by past success on radio, she sings about topics her contemporaries want to hear.

Counting on that youth appeal, Perez is pushing her genre mix one step further by adding not only hip-hop but also reggaeton to her banda, a traditional acoustic style of music that uses predominantly brass instruments.

"Esto Es Amor," due November 1 on Fonovisa Records, leads off with the single "Como Quieras, Cuando Quieras," a reggaeton/banda blend featuring Perez trading verses with reggaeton songstress Adassa.

The contrast is striking. The bass line is played by the tuba, which in Perez's banda/reggaeton mix also takes over the distinctive reggaeton bass line.

"We were looking for a new sound," Perez says. "We thought it'd be a good idea because of how the fans like to listen to both styles of music."

Perez readily admits that she goes "whichever way the fans pull me" because she embodies her fans.

Yolanda's Musical Beginnings

Born in Los Angeles to Mexican parents (who hail from banda music hotbed Zacatecas), Perez grew up listening only to music in Spanish by the likes of ranchero stars Graciela Beltran, Pepe Aguilar and Ana Barbara.

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"I didn't think about it, but a lot of my friends didn't listen to what I listened to," she says. That was the case even when she started singing banda professionally, when she was only 11 years old.

Things changed, she says, when she went to high school and sought out friends who knew nothing about her nascent fame.

"I started hanging out with people who didn't know me, who didn't know that I sang, and that's when (my music) turned around."

In 2003, Perez signed with Fonovisa and released "Dejenme Llorar," which peaked at No. 29 on the Billboard Top Latin Albums chart, driven largely by the single "Estoy Enamorada."

The hilarious track was a bilingual mishmash of banda and rap featuring an English-speaking Perez verbally sparring with her old-fashioned, Spanish-speaking "dad" -- Los Angeles radio personality Don Cheto of KBUE -- about her dating choices.

The song reached No. 7 on the Billboard regional Mexican airplay chart.

For Perez, mixing genres is simply part of her persona.

"Reggaeton is just an ingredient," she says. "I did it because it's one of the styles of music I like to listen to."