

Rita Vidaurri, Ranchera Singer Who Reclaimed Her Career, Dies at 94

Rita Vidaurri, known as La Calandria (the Lark) sang a farewell during the funeral of a fellow ranchera singer, Lydia Mendoza, in 2007 in San Antonio. She had rekindled her career in 2001 after performing at an 85th birthday celebration for Ms. Mendoza.

ZUMA Press Inc/Alamy

By [Daniel E. Slotnik](#)

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[Rita Vidaurri](#), who became famous across Latin America as a ranchera singer in the 1940s and '50s and stopped performing at the height of her renown, only to rekindle her career when she was nearing 80, died on Jan. 16 in San Antonio. She was 94.

Her death, at a care facility, was confirmed by her daughter, Linda Alvarado.

Ms. Vidaurri, who was nicknamed La Calandria, or the Lark, belted out songs with a powerful voice, often making risqué wisecracks during her performances. Based in San Antonio, she sang in Mexico, Cuba and other parts of Latin America, performing with artists like [Nat King Cole](#), [Eydie Gorme](#) & Los Panchos and [Celia Cruz](#). By the 1950s she was mentioned alongside such famous Tejana entertainers as Eva Garza and [Lydia Mendoza](#).

Ranchera, traditional Mexican country music, often features wistful love ballads or boisterous paeans to places in Mexico and Texas.

Ms. Vidaurri retired from the stage in the late 1950s at the insistence of her husband and former booking agent, Hillman Edward Eden. (They later divorced.) She performed rarely until 2001, when Graciela Sánchez, director of the [Esperanza Peace and Justice Center](#) in San Antonio, invited her to sing at an 85th birthday celebration for Ms. Mendoza.

“The people started screaming and hollering,” Ms. Vidaurri told an [interviewer for the PBS](#) program “Conversations” in 2011, “and a lot of the ladies came and said: ‘We haven’t heard from you! We thought you were dead or you were still living in Mexico City’” — because nobody knew anything about me. So Gracielita told me, ‘Do you think you want to sing again?’ And I said, ‘I guess so, I don’t have Mr. Eden to stop me anymore.’”

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Ms. Vidaurri began performing regularly (in 2007 she sang at Ms. Mendoza’s funeral), and in time connected with three other ranchera singers who had grown up in San Antonio and were famous from the 1940s to the ’60s. She and the three women — Beatriz Llamas, Blanca Rodríguez and Janet Cortez — performed together as [Las Tesoros de San Antonio](#), or the Treasures of San Antonio. (They continued to perform after Ms. Cortez died in 2014.)

A documentary film about the group and their lives, “[Las Tesoros de San Antonio: A Westside Story](#),” was released in 2016.

Ms. Vidaurri was born in San Antonio on May 22, 1924, to Juan and Maria (Castillo) Vidaurri. Her father was a mechanic who owned a garage, and her mother was a housekeeper. Her mother, who had encouraged her singing, died when Ms. Vidaurri was a teenager, leaving her to care for her siblings.

Ms. Vidaurri worked, attended night school and kept singing, and soon developed an audience. She performed on Mexican radio, won local singing contests and became an advertising model for Jax Beer. She went on to perform on stage with Mexican stars like Tín Tan, Jorge Negrete and Cantínflas.

A second marriage also ended in divorce. In addition to her daughter, Ms. Vidaurri, who lived in San Antonio, is survived by a sister, Henrietta Rodriguez; four stepsisters, Sofia, Rita, Yvan and Ellena Vidaurri; and a stepbrother, Ruben Vidaurri. She had three sons, all of whom died before she did.

Ms. Vidaurri continued to sing until nearly the end of her life. Her final public performance was at the Esperanza center last November.

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