

Happy Bubbly

A Tribute to Lawrence Welk

Looking for the first time over a list of songs that she's scheduled to sing this weekend, Anacani said, "They didn't include a song called 'Yours'?" She was disappointed. "It's very romantic" — it was written by Maria Grever in the 1930s — "and it's so Lawrence Welk."

Billed as "A Tribute to Lawrence Welk," the Summer Pops features Anacani, who was one of Welk's regulars when his show aired on PBS stations in the 1970s. In an earlier incarnation, in the 1950s and 1960s, *The Lawrence Welk Show* had been on ABC.

LOCAL EVENTS

Grandmothers in their cat glasses swooned. But the producers decided, after 17 years, that the Irish tenor and Lennon sisters were no longer so "wunnerful." ABC banished the whole wholesome crew in 1971.

At about that time, an adolescent Anacani was having dinner at Lawrence Welk Village in Escondido. Established by the maestro in 1964, the place hadn't yet evolved into a "resort." It was just some mobile homes, an old hotel, a few little shops, and the restaurant, said Anacani, who had already had some success as a singer in Latin America by then.

Born in Sinaloa, near Mazatlan, Mexico — she won't say when — Anacani moved with her family to Escondido when she was two years old. She was attending middle school here when her life, as she put it, "took a turn." Her parents got divorced, her father left the family, and her mother was left to raise seven kids by herself. Anacani said, "I wondered what I could do to help out. So I took a chance at



Anacani

show business." Anacani chose her stage name then; it's a combination of her grandmother's name (Ana) and her real name (Consuelo). She began to perform on Mexican television and to tour. It's an unlikely title for a soon-to-be Welk star, but among her first hits was a Spanish song called, in translation, "I'm a Rebel."

At the Welk restaurant on that evening, Anacani, her mother, and her agent had just finished their meal and were walking out, when Welk was walking in. "Mr. Welk and I crossed paths in the doorway. And that's how we met."

Did her agent know him? "No, not really. And we had no idea that he was going to be there, of course."

Welk auditioned Anacani and at first hired her to work only at the restaurant. "He called it his 'stepping stone' to the television show. I carried around my little guitar and sang for people on their birthdays and anniversaries. It was like a training program. I was the first one to do it, and it worked out well for me. I understand that for some people who followed me it didn't work out well. But I was so grateful to have been discovered by him and to think that I would get an opportunity to be on his show that I had seen as a little girl."

Why did her style appeal to Welk? "As soon as he met a person, he kind of knew if they would work for his show. Maybe he thought, 'Well, with this girl, who is so different, I could get another type of audience to join in with us.' Mr. Welk had brought in a lot of new people. The Lennons were no longer there. The piano player, Jo Ann Castle, was not there. Joe Feeney, the Irish tenor, was."

How would Anacani describe the Welk style of music? "Oh, gosh, I have to say it caters to the American family." But how would she describe its sound? "Well, in listening to the old recordings, I think that he came across with a very light-hearted, very happy, bubbly sound, and he did call it 'champagne music.'" So he actually coined that phrase for himself? "Yes, and I think he kept that style prominently throughout his career, although later he incorporated the big band sounds of Tommy Dorsey and all of those."

Who has taken up champagne music in his place? "You know, I don't think he can be replaced. I think when show business was younger, when he started out, things were a little easier.



Lawrence Welk

But now it has gotten so complicated. It's so much more competitive. Politics are very much a part of it. It's not as young and naive."

Nor are the Welk fans. So many have died — everybody's Welk-adoring grandmother, for example. "Mine, too," said Anacani.

Nonetheless, there is the tribute, at which Anacani will sing "Granada," a Spanish love-song medley, selections from *West Side Story*, and "Chucos Suaves," a salsa number, whose title, Anacani said, translates roughly to "Cool Guys."

After that, Anacani, who lives in Vista, will travel to the new Lawrence

Welk Resort in Branson, Missouri. (There is a third one in Palm Springs.) From there she will do a television special with, among others, the Irish tenor of old. Joe Feeney's still alive? "Yes, and singing better than ever."

— Jeanne Schinto

"A Tribute to Lawrence Welk"
San Diego Symphony
Summer Pops
Friday and Saturday,
August 23 and 24,
7:30 p.m.
Navy Pier, 960 N. Harbor Drive
Cost: \$15-\$59
Info and tickets: 619-235-0804

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