

HAVE YOUR SAY

A CIVIL DISCOURSE

Our goal is to maintain a civil tone. With that in mind, when writing letters, discourse should be cordial and people should be referred to in a respectful manner.

FOCUS ON THE ISSUE

Letters in response to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and, rather than mentioning the writer by name, should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Letters on news stories should also note the headline and publication date.

LETTER REQUIREMENTS

Letters for publication should be no longer than 300 words and must include the writer's address and daytime telephone number. Only the writer's name and hometown will be published. For mailed submissions, writers must sign the letter.

SENDING LETTERS

Mail or email letters to ...

Letters to the Editor

Daily Sun
1100 Main St.,
The Villages, FL 32159

Email

letters@thevillagesmedia.com

PHILIP J. MARKWARD

Publisher

BONITA BURTON

Executive Editor

LARRY D. CROOM

Reader Ombudsman

Larry is the newsroom's primary liaison to the community and welcomes your comments.

Email:

larry.croom@thevillagesmedia.com

Phone: 753-1119 ext. 9366

✧ A LOOK AT WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE LOVE

sketchbook extra



Have You Ever ... Felt the Passion In Fernando Varela's Voice?



While still in his late teens, Fernando Varela's love of music took hold in a big way when he performed weekly as a singer at Church on the Square — now part of the Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center — in The Villages.

"We used to drive him down there from Orlando," his father, Julio Varela, recalled recently. "He would learn the songs he was going to sing each Sunday in the hour and 10 minutes it would take to drive there."

From his early days as a singer with maestro Bill Doherty and the Central Florida Lyric Opera, Varela's talent and dedication led to even bigger stages and an ever-widening fan base. Those days at Church on the Square also led, significantly, to his meeting singer Susan Williams, now his wife.

Vivian Badami, of the Village of Mallory Square, is one of more than 1,000 local fans who traveled to Orlando for the Nov. 30 taping of Varela's first TV special, set to air on PBS in March. "We've followed him since we came here 10 years ago," Badami said.

Recently, her husband, Ron, won a chance drawing at The Sharon for a dinner with the Varelas, which Badami said was "like a fantasy ... they're both accomplished people, so down-to-earth and so giving. They're like a team in their effort to give back to the community."

Barbara Chadwick, of the Village of Bonita, also attended the taping. "He's just amazing," she said. "He takes your breath away. It brings me to tears when I hear him sing."

Ellen Hoffman, of the Village Rio Grande, said, "Fernando sounded wonderful. His voice is so full and rich!" And, in the words of Dale Davis, of the Village of Bonita, "he touches everybody's heart."

For his part, Varela expressed gratitude for the "overwhelming support of every person in the audience. It couldn't have been a better situation for a first television special."



Would you like to be a part of a Sunday Sketchbook?

Contact Daily Sun
writer-illustrator
Greg Williams at
greg.williams@
thevillagesmedia.com or
352-753-1119, ext. 9028.



PARENTAL PRIDE

Fernando was 2 years old when he and his family moved to Texas from Santurce, San Juan, Puerto Rico. His parents, Julio and Margarita F. Varela, took the family back to the island for two years in the mid-1980s — when Fernando learned Spanish, as a kindergartner — before settling in Florida. They live just a short distance from Fernando and Susan and their two sons in Orlando. But they're also quite familiar with The Villages, recalling Fernando's many years of singing here for Sunday services. "It's like we have a huge family," Julio said. "People from The Villages have always, always been behind my son. We are forever grateful, just like Fernando." Julio described the PBS concert as "out-of-this-world incredible ... I've never seen more standing ovations, ever!"



SHARING THE STAGE

For his concert special, Varela shared the spotlight at Orlando's Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts with a dazzling array of stage talents, including 16-year-old classical crossover star and prodigy Jackie Evancho. "We were both on 'America's Got Talent,'" Varela said. "I know her father and manager, so I reached out to her. It was definitely a thrill to share a stage with her. She started singing like that at 10 years old, and it just blew everybody away. She's an absolute sweetheart to work with ... with the voice of an angel, really."



HIS BIGGEST FAN

The singer's TV special, "Fernando Varela: Coming Home," seems aptly titled. "I knew about 95 percent of the people in the audience," Varela said. Among the 2,700 in attendance ("right there in the front row") was his "Yayita," grandmother Carmen Soldevilla, of Orlando. Varela made up the name for his grandmother "one day when I was 4, and that's what everybody in the family has called her since." Varela said his beloved Yayita is his No. 1 fan and gambling partner. "We have a very special relationship. I love her deeply."