

Cunha student sings for White House crowd

By Mark Noack [mark@hmbreview.com] | Posted: Thursday, September 4, 2014 4:56 pm

It might not have been the largest crowd 11-year-old Adriel Moncada had ever sung for, but it certainly was the most high-profile audience.

Adriel, a student at Cunha Intermediate School, performed last week as part of an ensemble at the National Policy Forum on Music and the Arts. The event, held at the Pixar headquarters in Emeryville, brought together lawmakers, business leaders and academics as part of a White House-led initiative to boost educational opportunities for the Hispanic community.

How did a sixth-grader from Moss Beach come to mingle with that crowd? The answer: mariachi music.

Adriel loves mariachi music and his dream is to someday be a professional singer, he said. Over the last five years, he's practiced both singing and playing the trumpet, and more recently he's performed with local youth ensembles, including Mariachi Media Luna and Grupo Folklorico Tonantzin.

Earlier this summer, he attended a weeklong mariachi workshop at San Jose State University led by the Mexican Heritage Corporation, and opportunity came knocking at his door. U.S. Department of Education officials approached the organization and said they were hoping to gather a group of talented youth to perform at the National Policy Forum this month.

Adriel was interested but a little intimidated by the opportunity. He initially wanted to back away, but he was encouraged by his classmates and teacher in the workshop, said his mother, Erika Moncada.

"I wasn't really nervous about the audition, but I was more worried if I got picked," he said.

For the audition, he sang one of his favorites, "Volver, Volver," a famous ranchera ballad by Vicente Fernández. Soon afterward, he learned he was selected to perform at the forum.

Adriel was one of about 30 young people who sang and played instruments for the gathering. Pixar was an exciting place to visit, he said. They received a brief tour of the animation area and got to see where many movies were made.

The experience further fueled Adriel's aspiration to be a musician, which could be a particular challenge for him, his mother said. Adriel was born with conductive hearing loss due to malformation



Adriel Moncada

Adriel Moncada, in the black coat, performs at VivaFest at San Jose State University earlier this year. The performance closed the weeklong workshop.

of some of his auditory bones. He uses hearing aids to compensate, but some low pitches are difficult for him to detect, she said.

“The music sometimes is the only way that he feels comfortable,” she said. “Everyone seems to think with his hearing loss, how can his (music) be so good?”

As a first-year student starting the new school year at Cunha, Adriel will be joining the school’s band class. His mother hopes that someday soon the local schools can also teach mariachi music.