

## Viva La Timbalera!

At the young age of 18, Jessica Rodriguez has worked her way up to being next best timbalera since the legendary Sheila E.

Studying timbales for the past three years at Harbor Conservatory as a student of Jose Madera and Louis Bauzo; Jessica never has a problem getting onstage. She has been invited to perform on stage by some of salsa's latest and greatest musicians such as: Ralph Irizarry y Son Criollo, Jimmy Bosch y Orquesta, Johnny Almendra y Los Jovenes Del Barrio, Michael Stuart y Orquesta, Willie Villegas y Orquesta, Ray Sepulveda y Orquesta, Spanish Harlem Orquesta, and Nelson Gonzalez y Orquesta.



“Being a musician did not even cross my mind, until my parents brought me to my first concert in Madison Square Garden...” this concert consisted of Jessica’s favorite salsa bands. The musicians made her feel like going on stage and performing with them. Afterwards, since Jessica knew that she doesn’t have a great singing voice; playing timbales were the next best thing. “I love the job of the timbale player and since I loved the way the timbale player played that night, I wanted to become a professional musician as a timbale player.” said Jessica.

The first time Jessica ever played on stage was about four months from when she even touched a timbale. “That was with my great teacher and his swinging Charanga band, Johnny Almendra Y Los Jovenes Del Barrio. He allowed me to play just a solo, and I was truly frightened. I tried my best, and he was very pleased with what he heard.” Her first performance was with a full band about a year ago, which had both male and female musicians. Within two years of playing Jessica has turned down a lot of gigs. When she finally played with this band it was for a specific yet strategic reason, “I wanted to play in an all male band first, so I could get exposure playing along side the males and gain the respect of males as a talent. Our first performance was very successful.”

One person that inspired Jessica through a women’s view is the great Celia Cruz. “She is a female who died with her self- respect and dignity. She gained many male musicians’ respect, and was known to them as a great talent. This stimulates me to become the best I can become, by using my talent.” Jessica is also loves Celia because she is one of her seven students that were awarded a

scholarship from her Music Foundation. This scholarship not only helped her financially, it also got her performing on stage at the Latin Billboard Awards in Miami Florida with salsa great Oscar De'Leon. Jessica could only think of one thing to say after her performance "Thank you Celia Cruz!"

Other than a "women's view" of inspiration, Jessica's main inspiration is, Marc Quiñones. He was one of the artists she saw at Madison Square Garden. "He plays a big role in my life. I fell in love with his playing, and I still am. His playing inspires me, and it makes me want to play just like him." Quiñones is truly a mentor he invited Jessica to rehearsals, gave her a foundation on how and what is a true musician, spoke to her about college and school, the risks of the music industry as an artist and of course inviting her to concerts.

Jessica's main goal is to live the life she imagined, to become professional musician as a full percussionist, record and appear on many CD's just like Bobby Allende, Marc Quiñones, and Ray Colon and also arrange just like Pablo "Chino" Nuñez, Ricky Gonzalez, and Sergio George.

I asked Jessica, "As an up and coming artist, how do you think your impact will be to all Latinas following in your footsteps?" she answered, "Hopefully Latinas will see that I will make my dream come true because of the talent God gave me. Hopefully Latinas will acknowledge that I'm not a so called "sex symbol" or anything along those lines, for there is no need to portray oneself as one if there is talent." One mistake Jessica has made and wants no one to do is not having confidence. "Lacking confidence can only take one so far. The more confidence one has, the faster dreams become reality."

Jessica Rodriguez is really someone to keep eyes and ears out for. Accomplishing so much at such an early age by networking and interacting with the great salsa musicians of our time, with Jessica around we do not have to worry about the true essence of salsa dying...because this timbalera is the heart of it all.

And now Mija Magazine's golden question: **Do you have any words of inspiration/advice for all the Mijas out there?** "Well, my advice would be, don't be misled as a "sex symbol". Keep in mind that this field is a male dominated field. Succeed through talent. If it becomes really difficult, then work harder, until you have what you dreamed of."

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