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## San Jose *es caliente* for Ricky Martin and Latino entertainers

By **Javier Erik Olvera**  
Mercury News  
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Believe it or not, San Jose is hot.

In fact - scorching.

Latin concert promoters from across the country are calling the city - with seven large performance venues - one of the premier cities in the country to book acts.

Nothing proves it more than Tuesday's U.S. launch of international superstar Ricky Martin's Black & White Tour at a sold-out HP Pavilion.

Next month, a concert by Spanish-language crooner Chayanne is also anticipated to fill the Pavilion despite his fans being almost exclusively Latino. Ticket sales are expected to mirror that of legendary superstar Barbra Streisand, who packed the venue in November, and Eric Clapton, who did the same last month.

The reason for the success of Latino acts is simple: San Jose's Latino population, the largest in the Bay Area at more than 30 percent of the city's more than 900,000 residents.

"The word has been out about the city for a long time," said Daniel Fenton, chief executive of the San Jose Convention & Visitors Bureau and Team San Jose.

The number of Latino concerts has slowly increased the past few years, but he believes it will explode thanks to a campaign touting increasingly successful ticket sales.

San Jose's Los Tigres del Norte is the latest example of the area's bankability. Its concert last weekend attracted about 18,000 people to the San Jose McEnery Convention Center.

### Economic results

This burst has had a

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growth.

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Ricky Martin performs during his concert in Panama City, Tuesday, March 20,... (Arnulfo Franco / AP)

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beneficial economic impact to the city, which has taken in millions of dollars as a result of Latino productions - including concerts, comedy shows and festivals.

Team San Jose, which manages six performance venues, estimates that 40 percent of \$31.5 million that has flowed into the local economy the past three years has come from Latino productions: That translates to \$12.5 million from 21 Latino events that attracted 147,000 people - compared with the \$19 million generated through 157 other events that attracted 219,000 to the venues.

Fenton predicts that amount will double within a few years - making it Team San Jose's largest area of

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"The more of a track record we have, the more attractive we are" to promoters, said Fenton, whose group manages the convention center, California Theatre, Center for the Performing Arts, Civic Auditorium, Montgomery Theater and Parkside Hall.

HP Pavilion has been a destination for Spanish-language performances for years and last year landed Latin America's most popular pop band - RBD.

Steve Kirsner, director of booking and events for HP Pavilion, is working on bringing back the band, which is trying to break into the mainstream music industry with its English-language debut released in December.

Mexican singer Marco Antonio Solis also has booked a September show in the Pavilion, which Kirsner anticipates will do well considering the Latin Grammy winner's popularity.

Vicente Fernandez, the so-called "King of Ranchero" who has won three Latin Grammy Awards, also recently decided to permanently reserve the Friday after Thanksgiving every year for a concert at the Pavilion, Kirsner said.

HP Pavilion neither keeps track of the economic impact generated by Latino productions nor monitors the exact number of events that have been held at the venue over the past few years.

#### Latino market

When it came to planning Martin's tour, there was no question his management team wanted to hit San Jose, said Bruno del Granado, Martin's Latin market manager.

"It is the fifth-largest Hispanic market in the country," del Granado said. "It's definitely an important area for us."

San Jose's appeal has trickled into nearby Sunnyvale, where an intimate nightclub also has attracted big Latin music acts.

The Barcelona, on the back end of an Indian restaurant on Mathilda Avenue, is sweetly redolent with curry. Still, it has booked Aterciopelados, Latin Grammy winner Julieta Venegas and rapper Pit Bull.

Its biggest coup has been Gloria Trevi, the controversial performer known as Mexico's Madonna, whose Sunnyvale appearance in January attracted fans from throughout the West.

Mario Gonzalez made the 725-mile journey from Phoenix to attend the concert, saying he couldn't believe "the club was able to get her" and that her performance was worth the trip.

Joaquin Lopez didn't care about the cost of his journey from Portland, Ore., to see Trevi, even though he drained his bank account to buy the plane ticket.

He called it "a chance in a lifetime" to get up close and personal with the singer in a venue with a small stage right next to the dance floor.

Manuel Moran, production director for Latino radio station KSJO-FM (92.3), says the industry is looking at this area because fans can reach it easily from throughout the region.

Moran, who helps book concerts at the Barcelona, calls the San Jose area the "center of the Bay Area" and believes it will continue to draw big acts.

Jessica Alfonso is a longtime Latin-pop fan, who takes in as many concerts as she can in Northern California.

She's not only a Martin fan, but also a Chayanne fan - having bought "almost everything they've ever recorded" since she was about 10 years old.

The 26-year-old San Jose native doesn't remember a time where the city drew back-to-back concerts from two superstars, saying, "Trust, me - I'd remember."

She recently bought tickets for Martin's show and plans to buy tickets for Chayanne's.

"I don't know what's happened that we're getting these concerts," she said. "But I'm digging it."

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