



Only in The Villages

LIFE IN FLORIDA'S FRIENDLIEST HOMETOWN

Fernando Varela Brings Hope for Puerto Rico Through Benefit

By **MICHAEL FORTUNA**
Daily Sun Staff Writer

After two hurricanes struck Puerto Rico, Fernando Varela helped his home community the best way he can — through his passion for music.

The vocalist brought together a variety of musicians and vocalists for a concert to benefit the island in its time of need through two performances held Tuesday night at the Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center.

Everyone involved with the production donated his or her time so 100 percent of the proceeds could go to Puerto Rico for Puerto Rico (PRxPR).

"I still can't believe we pulled it off,"

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George Horsford | Daily Sun

Fernando Varela sings songs about Puerto Rico for the audience during the Fernando & Friends Puerto Rico Relief Concert on Tuesday at The Sharon.



VARELA

Continued from A1

Varela told the audience. "I'm so overwhelmed."

In the lobby area before the show, Whitney Morse and Gary Powell collected donations in exchange for song requests.

Fernando's father, Julio Varela, was impressed with what he witnessed Tuesday.

"I'm blown away by the generosity of everybody here today," said Julio, who lives in Orlando. "It's all about giving. We're all Puerto Ricans for a day. This community has the biggest heart in the world."

Julio said he hadn't been able to reach his relatives on the islands in some 48 days.

"It's unbelievable to go through those conditions," Julio said.

Several special guests graced their presence on the stage throughout the evening, whether it was alumni of the Central Florida Lyric Opera, including Sam Reynolds, Debbie Garrett and Kristin Patterson, or Maestro Bill Doherty accompanying on the piano.

Autumn Encarnacion, The Sharon's production assistant, unveiled her vocal talent when she sang Alicia Keys' "If I Ain't Got You."

Two members of the group Sonido Tré — Quieque Domenech and Mayda Belen — joined Fernando on "En Mi Viejo San Juan," with Domenech playing the cuatro, a 10-string guitar. The duo also brought to life Miami Sound Machine's "Get On Your Feet."

Through the magic of video, producer extraordinaire David Foster played the piano while Fernando and his wife, Susan, sang a duet on "The Prayer."

Fernando sat at the piano to play and sing an emotional version of the Andra Day hit "Rise Up." He ended the first show with a powerful rendition of "Nessun dorma."

The concert held a special place in Carmen Valle's heart. The Village of Fernandina resident is from Puerto Rico; she still has family there on the island. Having seen Varela perform on a couple of occasions, she didn't want to miss this.

"God bless him," Valle said. "For my island. God bless Puerto Rico."

Steve Wydeveld, of the Village of Calumet Grove, was impressed with what he had seen.

"Fernando is phenomenal," Wydeveld said during intermission. "He's been a blessing to us with his voice. We're happy to be here to support him."