



Estefan's advice?
"Experience the moment, and
take advantage of where you are now."

Senior year of high school was probably the last time I spoke Spanish. But when I ask a Miami native for directions in my rusty accent—"¿Dónde está Gloria?"—my meaning is clear. Everyone knows the Latin pop superstar on a first-name basis. And people know her address: a posh villa on Star Island, overlooking Biscayne Bay.

All over the world Gloria Estefan has a reputation as a solid-gold recording artist, but in this city she is more than that—she's royalty. Practically every restaurant boasts an autographed photo, and locals argue over who has had the most spontaneous Gloria sightings (a cabana boy at the Delano hotel is in the lead with 67). Even with the current crop of sexy young Latin stars like Ricky Martin and Jennifer Lopez burning up the charts, her popularity never wavers. After all, Estefan and Miami Sound Machine were the first to bring fiery-hot rhythms and Spanish lyrics to the mainstream music charts in the '80s.

But that was a long time ago for the 43-year-old mother of two (son Nayib, 19, and daughter Emily, five). "I look back on some of my old videos, and I wonder, 'What was I thinking?' or better yet, 'What was I wearing?'" she says with a laugh. "That pink lipstick and, oh my God, the big hair!"

These days Estefan's a little more casual: She sits down for an interview wearing a white tank top, cargo pants and flip-flops, her hair in a ponytail. "I've changed," she reflects. "I've grown older and, I hope, wiser. I've experienced a great deal, and I have so much more to look forward to."

How much more? "Gazillions," she says without hesitation. And it's hard to gauge if she means all the projects she has lined up or the money they'll be raking in for her and her ▶

Livin' la vida Gloria

Singing sensation, mom, businesswoman and now movie star. Is there anything she can't do? A McCall's exclusive. BY SHERYL BERK

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Livin' la vida Gloria (continued from p. 50)



Class acts:
Estefan, left, with
Meryl Streep in
Music of the Heart.

husband, Emilio. The couple could now afford to rename their group Miami Money Machine: Estefan Enterprises has amassed a fortune estimated at \$200 million. That empire includes a \$14 million recording studio, two music-publishing companies, several real-estate holdings, Ocean Drive's Cardozo Hotel and two Cuban restaurants, Bongos Cuban Café at Walt Disney World and Larios on the Beach in Miami. As if all this isn't enough, Estefan has now set her sights on another medium: movies.

A diva debuts on the big screen (with Meryl Streep, no less!)

"I've been wanting to do a film," she admits. "But it had to be something that was a good fit. Acting is a hard thing, and you have to be ready to let yourself go. I was ready." She was originally suggested for the title role in *Evita* but lost out to Madonna. Then close pal and Sony Records president Tommy Mottola told her about a project, at the time called *50 Violins*, directed by slasher-cinema king Wes Craven. "I'm a horror buff, and I know Wes's work," Estefan explains. "So I thought it would be about a homicidal maniac who murders with musical instruments."

Instead, it was a heartwarming drama about teachers fighting to bring music education to an inner-city school. "I flipped out when I

heard that, because it's a subject near and dear to me," Estefan says. "My mother was a teacher in Cuba and later in Miami. I think teaching children music is so important, just as important as math or social studies in terms of their development."

She signed on for a small part, playing opposite Meryl Streep, Angela Bassett, Aidan Quinn and Cloris Leachman. "I was a little apprehensive at first. You know, it *is* Meryl Streep. But she made it all look so easy. My very first scene was with her—no pressure there."

The movie—now retitled *Music of the Heart* and due out this month—was shot on location at a school in East Harlem in New York City. "It was cool because the neighborhood residents recognized me," Estefan says. "I'd come out of my trailer, and there would be these sweet people calling, 'God bless you, Gloria. We love you.' I'm very grateful to my fans."

But truth be told, Estefan has never been entirely comfortable in the spotlight. "When I was a teenager growing up in Miami, I was pretty withdrawn," she says. "I open up to people little by little." Few friends at school knew the problems she was experiencing at home. "My father was very ill and in a wheelchair [with a degenerative muscular and neurological disease], and I had to care for him and my younger sister while my ▶



La familia, from left: Nayib, Emily, Gloria and Emilio Estefan in 1997.

mother worked and went to school at night," she recalls. "Music was my outlet for letting go of my frustrations and escaping my world. I would just sit in my room for hours and hours and write songs and poetry."

mother dragged her up onstage to sing, and at the end of the night Emilio asked her if she would join his band.

"Nights and weekends we rehearsed; he was my boss," she says. "Then—but not right away—he be-

Her first gig was in October 1975, a few months after she started college courses at the University of Miami to earn a degree in psychology. "I was putting together a band with some friends, and Emilio—who had his own band at the time—came to hear us and give a few pointers."

A few months later they met again, this time at a wedding. "He was the entertainment," she says. "I'll never forget that he played 'The Hustle' on the accordion. He wore these little shorts, and he was so cute—with great legs." Estefan's

came my first and only boyfriend." In the beginning, she hid in the background, shaking maracas, but Emilio thrust her into the spotlight on lead vocals. Together they launched Miami Sound Machine and went on to make nine platinum albums that crossed over from the Latin markets to the American Top 40. They were married in 1978, the day after Estefan turned 21. "We were just meant to be," she says, smiling. "We are so different, but we complement each other. He needs to fix things right away, and I'm more patient. I wait. It's a perfect balance."

She credits her husband for helping her through the toughest challenge: her life-threatening bus accident in 1990, in which she suffered a cracked and dislocated vertebra in her spine. "I went through the typical depression," she says. "I'm superindependent, and Emilio would have to walk me, lay me down. I couldn't wash my face or brush my teeth alone. He was a rock." The accident also crushed one of her fallopian tubes, and con-

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ceiving their second child, Emily, took over a year and required surgery. "We hoped, we prayed," she says. "And we have two terrific kids."

Madre mía: The great joys (and great worries) of motherhood

Today Emily is an adorable little girl, the spitting image of her mom, with dark curls and big brown eyes. "I call her Mini Me," Estefan says. "We're so alike, in our mannerisms, our temperament. I even see the music in her. When she thinks I'm not watching, she'll make up a silly little song and sing it so sweetly."

But Emily has more to deal with than most kindergartners. Sight-seeing boats filled with camera-snapping tourists sail by her home several times a day. "Sometimes we'll be playing outside and hear over a loudspeaker, 'There she is, folks! Gloria and her young!'" she says, joking, but clearly irritated by the intrusion.

She worries about how her children will handle the price of fame. "Unfortunately, all public figures are mag-

nets," she says. "Emily is so shy, and she hates photographers. She'll cover her face. When she was a toddler, she'd slam the top of her carriage down like a turtle shell."

As further protection, Estefan employs "tons" of security, and her personal bodyguard adores her daughter and often subs as Emily's play date.

Nayib—after some problems in high school (he was expelled from Gulliver Prep in Miami for playing pranks)—seems more at ease with his mom's star status and is drawn to show business himself. "He's studying acting and filmmaking at UCLA," Estefan says. "I miss him terribly. I want him to have the freedom to make his choices and live his life." She pauses to reconsider. "But he'd still better call his mother every day."

All of Estefan's family, friends and 20,000 fans will be with her on New Year's Eve, when she christens the new American Airlines Arena in Miami. "I really wanted to do something small..." she says coyly. "But I figured, hey, it's the new millennium."

That carefree attitude may extend into other parts of her life as well next year. "I have so many things in the pipeline," she says. "With a friend, I'm writing a screenplay that we're going to produce ourselves, and right now we're writing and producing a TV movie based on the books of [past-life therapy guide] Brian Weiss, M.D. It's my duet year—I have a song with Rosie O'Donnell on her Christmas album, and "Music of My Heart" with 'N Sync. I'll have a new Spanish album out in March, and I hope to do a megatour next summer. And, of course, I'd love to act again—now that I've gotten my feet wet."

It's either the scorching Miami sun or the endless list of activities that makes Estefan stop to catch her breath. "I know it's a lot to tackle, but I think the universe is about constant growth and evolution," she says. "To me, this life is just the first stop. You've got to experience the moment and take advantage of where you are now. You get nothing without a lot of hard work—and a little risk." ■

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