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Jennifer Lopez and Marc Anthony hope 'Q'Viva! The Chosen' translates

Jennifer Lopez and Marc Anthony hope that nothing is lost in translation when 'Q'Viva! The Chosen' is retooled on Fox for English-speaking audiences.

By Yvonne Villarreal, Los Angeles Times

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"Q'Viva! The Chosen," which premieres Saturday on Fox, is certainly not the only reality show that seeks to mint new stars from undiscovered musical, dancing and singing talent — even on its own network.

But the program does stand alone in another respect — it is the first bilingual competition series to be broadcast on a major network. The 12-part series, starring Jennifer Lopez and her former husband Marc Anthony, travels through 21 countries in Latin and South America in search of new talent, and naturally much of the conversation is in Spanish.

A Spanish language version of the program already began airing in January on Univision, where it opened to just more than 2 million viewers. The show is being retooled for an English-speaking audience — subtitles will be used when contestants or judges speak Spanish or Portuguese. Voice-over transitions that originally aired in Spanish were redone in English as well as segments featuring Lopez and Anthony speaking in Spanish. The show will be roughly 70% in English, according to Michael Herwick, one of the show's executive producers.

"I wanted to make a show that the Latin community could identify with, be proud of and enjoy, while at the same time, introduce an entirely new audience," wrote Simon Fuller, who is producing "Q'Viva!" and is also the creator and executive producer of Fox's "American Idol," in an email. "The DNA of the show is that it was made to be seen in any country and in any language while still retaining the authenticity and Latin flavor."

Despite its high wattage stars, the 12-episode series is getting a relatively quiet launch and a tough time slot — Saturdays at 8 p.m, where it temporarily replaces "Cops." Still, Lopez seemed confident the series will find its footing and isn't worried about potential language barriers.

"I think it'll do fine," she told The Times at a party for "American Idol" where snippets of "Q'Viva" played on TV screens. "People are used to seeing different languages on TV. And I think when shows are good, they transcend language. And I think this one is good."

The bulk of bilingual programming airs on channels such as MTV Tr3s, mun2, SiTV and LATV where its

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aim is to bridge the gap between American and Latin culture primarily for young viewers. Spanish-language networks have experimented with bilingual programming before — Univision aired "El Show With Paul Rodriguez" in the early '90s. More recently, Telemundo is trying out a Spanglish talk show with Cristina Saralegui. And even Nickelodeon's massive hit "Dora the Explorer" dabbles with Spanish for its young viewers.

But "Q'Viva: The Chosen" is something new for a major network. In the rare instances when Spanish was broadcast on a major network in the past, the Spanish was typically extremely brief or played for comic effect — a device that dates to Ricky Ricardo's Spanish outbursts on "I Love Lucy" in the 1950s.

"You never know how things will work out unless you try them," said Tim Brooks, a TV historian. "I guess Fox deserves a bit of credit for what they're doing here, in that sense. One of the problems the major networks have had over the past 20 years or so has been their lack of experimentation. All of that seems to happen on cable."

In view of the country's sweeping demographic changes, Alex Nogales, president and chief executive of the National Hispanic Media Coalition, said Fox's decision to air the program is not surprising.

"A great majority of the Latino population in the United States is English-speaking and have an English-language preference," Nogales said. "When you consider that, Fox, or any other network, would be foolish not to start exploring those waters. This is a good way for Fox to get into the business of programming for Latinos."

In the last year, Fox has launched the English-language digital venture, Fox News Latino, as a way to reach the demographic. And last month, Univision and Disney are in talks to produce a 24-hour news channel for Latinos in English.

According to a 2011 report by Scarborough Research, almost a third of Latinos in the U.S. prefer to speak English more than Spanish, or English and Spanish equally.

Whether "Q'Viva" will be appeal to that group or even non-Latinos remains to be seen. But Chon Noriega, director of UCLA's Chicano Studies Research Center, believes that as a first step in bilingual programming for a major network, the reality format was a good idea.

"You can watch 'The Apprentice' without the sound on and know exactly what's happening," he said. "Reality programming is more readable."

The question is, Nogales said, are people really interested to see untapped talent from Latin countries, or will curiosity lie in how newly divorced Lopez and Anthony interact.

"Who's not going to watch just to see the *chisme*?" he said. "That's some good *chisme*: 'Oh, did you see the way he looked at her?' Oooh."

'Q'Viva! The Chosen' info

Where: Fox

When: 8 p.m. Saturday

Rating: TV-PG-DL (may be unsuitable for young children with advisories for suggestive dialogue and coarse language)

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