



Cote de Pablo

1979 – Present

Actress and Singer

***How does a young Chilean Actress find fame and fortune in America portraying an Israeli Mossad officer turned special agent, in the popular CBS crime drama NCIS?***



**Young Maria José and  
her mother María Olga**

The actress known as Cote de Pablo was born María José de Pablo Fernández in November 1979, in Santiago, Chile. She was the eldest daughter of an upper-class, right-wing family and, given the social stratification of Chilean society, never knew any poor people. That sheltered environment changed when she was 10 and her mother, María Olga Fernández who was a television personality in Chile, was offered a job at a Spanish-language network, Telemundo, in Miami. Her father, Francisco de Pablo, agreed to give up his business and the entire family moved to Florida. Once in the United States, de Pablo began to focus her education on music and theater, including studying at Carnegie Mellon University. The name “Cote” is a nickname for “María José.” and is a popularly used in Chile.

At age 15, long before de Pablo was known for her work in the United States and before Hollywood began to take note of her, she served as the co-host on the Latin-American talk show *Control* opposite *Entertainment Tonight* host Carlos Ponce. This was the start of de Pablo's career, even before she began formal training as an actor in the prestigious theater program at Carnegie Mellon. Despite her teenage screen credits, de Pablo faced the difficult experience of a young actress struggling to make it in New York. After graduation she spent some time working restaurant jobs in Manhattan before her career really took off. While working as a waitress she performed at the famous Public Theater in Downtown Manhattan and picked up a small part on the daytime soap opera *All My Children*. It all led up to her first big break in American television: a leading role on Fox's new legal drama, *The Jury*.



However, Fox canceled *The Jury* after only ten episodes. This cancellation proved to be fortuitous. No sooner did Fox discontinue *The Jury*, then CBS came and presented de Pablo with a much more successful series, and a character that would come to define her career. She was cast by the producers of *NCIS* (Naval Criminal Investigative Service) in the role Ziva David, the Mossad Liaison Officer who becomes a Special Agent and one of the show's most important characters. Cote de Pablo first appeared in this long-running police procedural's season 3 premiere and remained with the show through season 11. After that season's finale, she took a long hiatus before returned in 2019. Appearing in over 194 episodes, Cote de Pablo's

earned a lot of fans — including prominent rabbis, journalists, and political scientists. The *Jerusalem Post* published an article that cheered de Pablo's character as the most prominent Israeli character on American network TV.

So how had she managed the transition from a nice Chilean girl, from an upper-class family and educated in a private Catholic school, to the role of Ziva David the Israeli agent, customarily wearing a pistol on her hip and a golden Star of David around her neck? Cote de Pablo answers by explaining,

**“I was one of the last to audition, and I don’t think they had a clear idea of what they wanted. So, I interpreted Ziva as a cool, competent woman, not the usual Hollywood sex symbol but someone who was comfortable in her own sexuality and used to working with men on an equal footing,” she explained. “It helped that by my looks, I could be taken for almost any nationality.”**

Two days before her first appearance in the cast of *NCIS*, Cote de Pablo was given the script of a lengthy phone conversation — in Hebrew. She explained, “I got a Hebrew teacher and didn’t rest or sleep for 48 hours,” she recalled “I wanted to do the language justice. I want to apologize to all Israelis if I didn’t succeed, but boy, did I try.”

Nominations and awards soon followed to confirm her success. In 2006, she won an Imagen Award for Best Supporting Actress on Television and in 2011 ALMA Award for Favorite Television Actress—Leading Role in Drama, both for her work on *NCIS*. In January 2014, de Pablo was cast as the wife of one of the Chilean miners in the film *The 33*, the story of 2010 Copiapó mining accident when 33 miners were stuck underground for 69 days. In an interview, de Pablo said, “I’m Chilean, so it really hit close to home...I saw the first, the second, and the third miner come out, and I remember I was just a mess! It was an incredible thing, and the world was glued.” Her performance earned her another Imagen Award, this time for Best Supporting Actress in a Feature Film.



While we admire Cote De Pablo for her acting ability, she is also an accomplished singer. In fact, her career began in the Broadway theatres by participating in musicals. She was even offered a major role in the Broadway musical called the *Mambo Kings*. De Pablo performed a portion of Tom Waits' song "Temptation" on the *NCIS* episode "Last Man Standing" and her full



performance of the song, including some lyrics in French, appears on *NCIS: The Official TV Soundtrack*. She is the singer in Roberto Pitre's *Vivo en vida* where she sings "Samba in Prelude" and "Cry Me a River". De Pablo was also featured on the 33's official soundtrack, singing "Gracias a la Vida".

Cote has a home in Santiago, Chile

and she is proud of her Chilean heritage. However, she also resides in Los Angeles, California and is proud, as well, in America because of how welcoming and kind the country has been for her. She strongly fights for immigration rights and advocates on their behalf. She says she knows how difficult it is for immigrants to make it into another country and believes, given the opportunity, everyone can become successful in life. Today, Cote de Pablo is living comfortably with most of her wealth derived from her acting career earning \$120,000. per episode on NCIS. She has also signed lucrative sponsorship deals over the years with cosmetics and beauty brands.



Cote prefers a quiet life rather than the glitter and glamour of Hollywood fame. She is not very forthcoming about her personal life, does not maintain a social media presence, and tends to keep the most intimate details of her life hidden from the public eyes. We do know, however, that she had a ten-year relationship with Ecuadorian-born actor David Serrano, but the two broke up in 2015. When in Santiago, Chile, she treasures the fact that she usually goes unrecognized in the street.

***"I am not on Facebook. I am not on Twitter. I know a lot of celebrities who go around complaining how little privacy they have. And then my question to that is always, 'Well, how much of yourself are you putting out there?' - Cote de Pablo***

## TO LEARN MORE

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