



# Cultural Impact

*Gain insight into the history of the genre, its development, and some of the artists' perspectives and contributions.*

## HISTORY

The first documented Cuban bolero, “Tristezas” (“Sorrows”) by José “Pepe” Sánchez, can be traced back to Santiago de Cuba in the 1880s. “Tristezas” established the bolero’s signature slow guitar, soft rhythm, and lyrics of longing, romance, and heartbreak.

In Mexico in the 1940s, bolero was cemented as a mainstream genre during the Golden Age of cinema with bolero artists’ involvement in film scenes and storylines. In the United States in the 50s and 60s, Nat “King” Cole and Eydie Gormé helped popularize the genre with their own renditions of traditional boleros. As bolero music continued to travel across the globe, it influenced and was influenced by the foreign genres and cultures it encountered.

## GROWTH

New variations splintered from traditional bolero as it expanded worldwide. The Cuban group, Trio Matamoros, popularized an adaptation called bolero-son, which is a hybrid of the bolero and the Cuban genre son cubano. In the US, bolero dance had a huge influence on the development of ballroom dance as we know it today. Despite its global reach, the traditional bolero’s melancholy tone and romantic lyrics remained consistent through it all.

However, with the spread of other Latin American genres, younger generations all over the world grew less likely to connect with the traditional bolero. It wasn’t until the 1990s that we saw a resurgence of bolero worldwide. Latin American musician and scholar Carlos Quintana credits this return of the bolero to the release of Luis Miguel’s classic bolero album *Romance* in 1991. Quintana writes in an [article](#) about the history of bolero, “Bolero is a timeless style that defines like no other the essence of the romanticism we find in Latin music.”

## PERSPECTIVE

According to Roberto Carlos of the Mexican bolero trio Tres Souls, “L.A. is a huge part in creating this bolero movement. People come from different cultural backgrounds, but being Latino and loving culture is what L.A. is about.”

This new generation of bolero artists in Los Angeles also bring a refreshing perspective on inclusivity. Tres Souls’ female lead singer Rocio Mendoza challenges bolero’s male dominance by representing women in the genre. Her bandmate Carlos acknowledges the contributions of women in bolero music, stating in an [interview](#) that “Mexican pianist and songwriter, Consuelo Velázquez, wrote the famous ‘Bésame Mucho,’ [“Kiss Me Lots”] and composer María Grever wrote ‘Cuando Vuelva a Tu Lado,’ [“When I Return to Your Side”] [...] These women wrote like over 800 boleros in their time. So the power of women has always been there.” Tres Souls, and the new generation of bolero artists, impact the Los Angeles community not only by popularizing bolero music, but also by making it a more inclusive space.



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## WANT TO LEARN MORE?

[“Bolero: A Romantic Musical Genre with Cuban Origins”](#) (Article) by Iliana Cabrera, World Music Central, December 10, 2023.

[“Bolero: Identity, Emotion and Poetry Turned into Song”](#) (Article) by UNESCO, 2022.

[“The Bolero is Declared National Cultural Heritage in Cuba”](#) (Article) by Cuba50 August 26, 2021.

[“The Bolero is Declared Cultural Heritage of the Cuban Nation”](#) (Article) by teleSUR, The Institute of the Black World 21st Century, September 14, 2021.

[“El Bolero Nunca Va Pasar de Moda:’ The Oaxacalifornian Keeping Mexico’s Romantic Ballads Alive in L.A.”](#) (Article) by Melissa Montalvo, March 3, 2021.

[“History of Bolero”](#) (Article) by Carlos Quintana, liveaboutdotcom, May 24, 2019.

[“How Did the Bolero Move From Cuba to Mexico?”](#) (Article) by Hearing the Americas.

[“Interview Boleros de Noche founder Roberto Carlos”](#) (Video) by KCAL 9, October, 11, 2024.

[“Introduction to Latin American Music: A Hispanic Heritage Month Listening Guide”](#) (Article and Playlists) by Betto Arcos et al., Hollywood Bowl, October 13, 2023.