

APOLLO

EDUCATION



**APOLLO THEATER
WALK OF FAME
LEGEND**

CELIA CRUZ

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Admired by audiences around the world as a legend of **Salsa and Latin music**, Celia Cruz was born on October 21, 1925 in Havana, Cuba. Growing up in a musical household, Celia loved to hear her mother sing and watch her aunt dance to **Cuban music**. Though shy throughout her youth, music helped her feel free to express herself, especially when she sang.

Following high school, she enrolled in classes at the Havana National Conservatory of Music, where she studied music theory and took piano lessons. Around the same time, she also started performing in night clubs and entering talent contests similar to **Amateur Night at The Apollo**.



“AZUCAR!”

Winning contest after contest, word of her talent spread and before she knew it, she was performing regularly around Havana. By the late 1940s, she was drawing crowds to famous music venues like the Tropicana Club, as well as [singing on the radio, television, and in movies](#).

In 1950, Celia's big break came when she was invited to perform with the most popular band in all of Cuba, [La Sonora Matancera Orchestra](#). Recording seventy-four albums with the group over the course of fifteen years, “La Sonora” became Celia's musical family and helped make her a star in the **Latin music** world.

With the onset of the Cuban Revolution (1953-59), life in Havana changed drastically, especially for musicians who were restricted from performing. Due to the political and cultural unrest, Celia and her “La Sonora” bandmates decided to leave Cuba in 1960.

After living in Mexico City for a year, Celia moved to New York City in 1962. Settling into a small apartment on Manhattan's Upper West Side, she became the first Latin

American woman to perform at Carnegie Hall. In the years to come, she would also sell out concerts at Radio City Music Hall, Lincoln Center, and the Apollo Theater, before stepping out onto the world stage.

Celia gained international recognition for her contributions to **Salsa music** in the 1970s. Touring the world with bands like [Johnny Pacheco and the Fania All-Stars](#), Salsa fans flocked to see her perform, referring to her affectionately as the “Queen of Salsa.”

No performance of Celia's was complete without her stunning outfits and signature catchphrase: “*Azucar!*” meaning “*Sugar!*” in Spanish. Her legendary outfits included bright colored wigs, beautiful feathers, dazzling dresses, and

legendary high-heeled shoes, all of which made her appear larger-than-life.

Over her 60-year career, Celia won three GRAMMY awards, four Latin GRAMMY awards, and the GRAMMY Lifetime Achievement Award. She was also honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame for her work in movies and television, including numerous appearances on the popular children's program, [Sesame Street](#). Always young at heart, she formed the Celia Cruz Foundation shortly before her passing to support underprivileged Latino students in their pursuits of music.

Celia Cruz performed up until her death on July 16, 2003. Marking the 50th anniversary of her first appearance at The Apollo, she was inducted into the Apollo Theater Walk of Fame on March 22, 2014.

DO NOW!

Like Celia, spice up your next performance with a colorful wig, a dazzling dress or suit, and a wild pair of shoes. Then sing and dance along to [this Celia Cruz playlist](#) like you're your very own Queen or King of Salsa!

CELIA SAYS!

Similar to the game Simon Says, study the lyrics below to the hit Salsa song "[Quimbara](#)," first recorded by Celia Cruz and Johnny Pacheco in 1974. Then see if you can say what "Celia says" in [this classic Sesame Street performance!](#)

"Le lo le, le lo la. Quimbara quimbara, quma quimbamba."

WORDS TO KNOW

CUBAN MUSIC

Song and dance styles native to Cuba, each having its own distinct rhythmic feel. Popular styles include **Cha-Cha**, **Rumba**, and **Mambo**.

SALSA MUSIC

A popular style of dance music that emerged in New York City in the late 1960s. Meaning "Sauce" in Spanish, "**Salsa**" heavily drew from Cuban song and dance traditions, as well as **Bomba** music from Puerto Rico and **Jazz** from the United States.

LATIN MUSIC

A general term for any style of music originating in a Latin American country or community. A wide range of popular styles include **Son** (Cuba), **Reggaeton** (Puerto Rico), **Bachata** (Dominican Republic), **Bossa Nova** (Brazil), **Tango** (Argentina), and **Boogaloo** (NYC).





DID YOU KNOW?

Amateur Night at the Apollo has been in existence since the theater's opening in 1934. Over 80 years later, the long-running talent contest continues to produce the stars of tomorrow -- today!

Celia was known by an assortment of nicknames, including "La Guarachera de Cuba," a reference to her being a master of the fast-paced [Guaracha style of singing from Cuba](#).

Question: *Can you remember the other nickname Celia was "crowned" with in the 1970s?*

Did you know the term "**Latin American**" refers to any country in North or South America where a romance language such as Spanish, French, or Portuguese is spoken?

"Latin America" therefore includes Mexico and most countries in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean!

Similar to The Apollo's famous "**Tree of Hope**," which performers have been rubbing for good luck for over 80 years, Celia grew up with a similar good luck tradition in Havana. Located in the CMQ Radio station headquarters, the "**Bench of Dreams**" was believed to bring success to anyone who sat on it before they performed on air. Needless to say, Celia sat on that bench many times!

Answer: "Queen of Salsa"

Leadership support for Apollo Education Programs provided by:

The Ronald O. Perelman
Family Foundation



Generous support from Apollo EmpowerHer, Conscious Kids Inc., Con Edison, Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation, Inesperity, The Reginald F. Lewis Foundation, Ellis L. Phillips Foundation, Pinkerton Foundation, and public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature, and from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.
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