

Cuban entertainment legends: Daniel Santos



Born into poverty in Puerto Rico in 1916, the name Daniel Santos is legendary in Cuba. Santos was one of the most influential singers and songwriters in Latin and South America during the middle of the last century. From the pen of Pedro Flores, his early love-lost lyrics -- a series of aching, mostly one-word hits such as "Despedida," "Obsesión," "Irresistible," "Perdón," "Venganza" -- influenced author Gabriel García Márquez as much as other singers, while his later, patriotic material is said to have riled American intelligence officers and inspired Fidel and the Cuban Revolutionaries.

Though he was transplanted from school in Santurce to the workforce to supplement his family's wages, he later returned to sing in the school choir and also learned English. Still, he was living on his own by the age of 14. Like many of his countrymen, Santos made the move to New York in the mid-'30s, and impressed Puerto Rican songwriter Pedro

By 1938, Daniel Santos was performing and recording with the Flores Quartet, with whom he recorded most of his early hits:

"Tú Serás Mía," "Venganza," "Esperanza Inútil," "Perdón," "Irresistible," and the definitive version of Flores' best composition, "Despedida."

Beginning in 1946, he spent much time performing in Cuba and was inspired to write dozens of songs, one of which "Sierra Maestra" was broadcast by Fidel during the Movimiento 26 de Julio.

He continued performing in the United States as well as Latin America, performing his most famous songs and relating many anecdotes concerning his wild private life during his early years. He was living in quiet retirement in Florida at his death from a heart attack in 1992.



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