

# *Famous Cuban entertainers with an introduction to Ibrahim Ferrer*

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Ibrahim Ferrer was born at a dance in San Luis, near the city of Santiago de Cuba on February 20, 1927. His mother died when he was 12, leaving him orphaned and forcing him to sing on the streets to earn money.

In 1940 he formed his first musical group—a duet with his cousin—called Youths of Son or *Jovenes del Son*. They performed at private functions and managed to scrape together enough money to live on.

Over the next few years, Ferrer would perform with many musical groups, including Conjunto Sorpresa and Orquesta Chepin-Choven. In 1953 Ibrahim began performing with Pacho Alonso's group in Santiago, Cuba. In 1959 the group moved permanently to Havana, renaming themselves Los Bocucos, after a type of drum widely used in Santiago.

With Alonso, Ferrer primarily performed son, guaracha and other up-tempo songs. However, he yearned to sing boleros. It was not until many years later, with the release of Ry Cooder's Grammy Award winning Buena Vista Social Club recording in 1997, that Ferrer's talent as a bolero singer would become widely known.

In 1996, Ferrer took part in the World Circuit sessions, when it was announced that an old-style bolero singer was required. In that year, he recorded the album *A Toda Cuba le Gusta* with the Afro-Cuban All

Stars, and the album was nominated for a Grammy Award.

In 1998 he recorded an album in the style of son-jazz big band fusion for the Cuban label EGREM, *Tierra Caliente: Ibrahim Ferrer con Los Bocucos* which includes Ferrer's voice, band leader Roberto Herrera's arrangements and lead trumpet, and the Bocucos's accompaniment.

In 1999 Ry Cooder recorded Ibrahim's first solo album. In 2000, at the age of 72, he received a Latin Grammy for Best New Artist. Ibrahim released his second solo recording, *Buenos Hermanos*, in 2003 and continued touring in Europe.

In 2004 he was awarded a Grammy, but was denied permission by the U.S. government to enter the U.S. to receive his award under a U.S. law designed to prohibit entry by "terrorists, drug dealers and dangerous criminals." Ibrahim, who had been granted entry previously in order to perform in concert, was dumbfounded by the decision.

Ibrahim contributed in 2005 with the APE Vision Artists Project Earth album *Rhythms Del Mundo: Cuba*, a collaboration with artists Coldplay, U2, Sting, Dido, Faithless, Jack Johnson, and Maroon 5.

Ibrahim Ferrer's last recording was *Mi Sueño*, an album devoted to the bolero. He died at age 78 of multiple organ failure on August 6, 2005 at CIMEQ hospital in Havana after returning from a European tour. He was buried in the Colón Cemetery, Havana. *Mi Sueño* was released, posthumously, in 2006.

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