

"La Bamba" Encyclopedia Article

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"La Bamba"

Ritchie Valens helped merge traditional Mexican music with American rock 'n' roll when he recorded "La Bamba" in 1958. Since his version, "La Bamba" has been recorded over 150 times in the United States. The lasting influence of Valens's music after his tragic death in 1959 made *La Bamba* a fitting title to the 1987 movie that chronicled the brief life and rise to fame of the Chicano singer. The sound track of the film, recorded by Los Lobos, regenerated interest in the song in the mainstream media. The song has a long history, recorded by Trini Lopez in 1966, by the Plugz in 1979, and also by the Rice University Marching Band and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.

The rhythmic history of "La Bamba" places it as a " *son jarocho*," meaning a musical form of the *jarocho*, the mixed race people of the eastern coastal region of Mexico. La Bamba was also the name of a dance from the Mexican colonial period, a very old musical tradition that merged African, Caribbean, and indigenous cultures from the southern part of the state of Veracruz. The *sones jarochos* are performed on stringed instruments like a small harp, a small eight-string guitar, and a small four-string guitar. La Bamba was performed in the famous Coliseo Theatre in Mexico City in 1790. Despite its long history and varying versions, "La Bamba" is inextricably linked to the emergence of Chicano Rock in America.

Further Reading:

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