

LOLA LA GRANDE

Singer of the Mexican Spirit

With the death of Lola Beltrán, known as Lola La Grande, Mexico's *ranchera* music loses one of its best performers.

Lucila Beltrán Ruiz was born in Rosario, Sinaloa, 67 years ago. From the age of eight she sang at her local church and, after debuting as a soloist at a town celebration, she became a regular feature at all local festivities. In 1952, when she saw a live radio perfor-

Singing ranchero is pure feeling and a little voice: the feeling makes the voice bigger if it's small and smaller if it's big.

LOLA BELTRÁN

Cuartoscuro



Lola Beltrán in concert.

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mance of Mexico City’s largest radio station, the XEW, she decided to try for a chance to sing on the radio. She was hired, however, as a secretary. After two attempts, on the third try the newly baptised Lola Beltrán got her chance to sing on *Así es mi tierra* (This Is My Hometown) in 1953.

Her original style and vigor made her stand out from the start. She was also fortunate in working with composers like Tomás Mendez, José Alfredo Jiménez and Rubén Fuentes, whose songs were just right for her voice and temperament. Almost immediately, Lola became “the female voice of *ranchera* music.” Her renderings of songs like *Cucurrucucú Paloma* (Cooing Dove), *Huapango Torero* (Bullfighter’s *Huapango*), *Paloma Negra* (Black Dove) and *Gorrioncillo pecho amarillo* (Yellow-Breasted Sparrow), by Tomás Mendez, brought new vitality to *ranchera* music.

Lola Beltrán rapidly took her place as a favorite of the public and her name became internationally known. Her popularity was never a pretext for changing or trying to adapt to fashion or producers’ demands. She remained loyal to her style and her songs for 40 years; she recorded more than 75 records, acted in 50 films, made frequent television and radio appearances, and sang at fairs, arenas and festivals, as well as at receptions for heads of state and on presidential tours. As if that were not enough, she also broke new ground: in 1976 she performed in Mexico City’s Fine Arts Palace, until then closed to popular singers. Her performance prompted protests that rapidly quieted down in the wake of her unquestionable triumph (the audience broke into song during some numbers). By 1990, she encountered no opposition at all upon returning to the same venue.

Abroad, Lola was considered an ambassadress of Mexican song. In 1988, singer Linda Rondstat called her “a world class singer, on a par with Billie Holiday

and Edith Piaf.” She graced stages the world over; at the Olympia Theater in Paris, she performed before people like Caroline of Monaco, Alain Delon, Johnny Holliday and Sophia Loren. Loren said that Lola knew better than anyone else

how to paint a picture of the Mexican people through her songs.

Thousands went to say farewell to Lola La Grande at the Fine Arts Palace in Mexico City where a national memorial ceremony was held and in Mazatlán, Sinaloa, where she was buried while a mariachi band played the songs that made her famous. **W**

Elsie Montiel
Assistant Editor