

NARRATIVE TEXTS

Selena Quintanilla Perez, Singer, 1971-1995

The singing sensation known as Selena was an icon of contemporary Tejanos who move easily between two cultures. Her surging career seemed to know no bounds when she was murdered at age 23.

Selena grew up in a blue-collar neighborhood of Lake Jackson. Her father, a Dow Chemical employee and erstwhile rock musician, marshaled his three children into a family band. When her parents decided to invest in a restaurant, nine-year-old Selena had a venue in which to perform publicly.¹

The restaurant enterprise collapsed in the economic downturn of 1981. Embracing a new gamble, the Quintanillas refurbished an old van and took to the road. Selena y Los Dinos played at weddings, quinceañeras, dinner clubs, dance halls, and talent shows. They fused norteño, reggae, cumbia, and pop strands into a distinct Tejano sound.

Everywhere Selena drew attention for her resounding voice and fluid stage presence. She performed in jeweled bras and tight high-waisted pants. The band added new members and began recording albums. Selena was named female vocalist of the year by the Tejano Music Awards in 1987 and in each of the next seven years. In 1989 EMI Latin presented her with a six-figure recording contract. Her concert tour to Mexico met with a warm and responsive audience.

Trusting intuition, Selena made bold decisions. At age 20 she married the band's drummer, Chris Perez, without her parents' knowledge. She opened boutiques in Corpus Christi and San Antonio, showcasing jewelry and clothes of her own design. But Selena remained close to her family and practiced their Jehovah's Witness faith. She devoted many hours to anti-drug and stay-in-school campaigns.

In 1993-1994 Selena garnered an Emmy and Double Platinum and Quadruple Platinum awards for her music, and in February 1995 she performed to a record crowd of 60,000 in the Houston Astrodome. She was working on a crossover album in English when she was shot to death by the president of her fan club. Her grieving admirers took to the streets in an outpouring of vigils, memorials, and tributes.



Quotations

A reason that the whole family has been able to stay together and work is that since we were little, Dad has always taught us to share and to always treat people the way you want them to treat you. And he applies that in our family.—Selena in a 1993 interview²

I hope to make a lot of people happy with my music. . . . Words have a strong message, and somewhere out there somebody's going through something. And if I can touch somebody in that way, that's the ultimate.—Selena in a 1994 interview³

She was a humble, good-hearted person. It wasn't a façade. It wasn't an act. She was humble 24 hours a day. She knew where she came from. She never forgot that. Fame never came between her and her fans.—Jose Behar, EMI Latin Records⁴

She was one of us, a girl from the barrio, and we loved her as much as we were proud of her. . . . She sang with conviction and feeling that hit our heart.—Tino González⁵

Photo

ITC *San Antonio Light* Collection (unnumbered) published 11/12/91. ITC *San Antonio Light* Collection.

Endnotes

¹ Major sources for biographical information in this article are Rick Mitchell, "Selena Story," *Houston Chronicle*, May 21, 1995, online http://www.selenaforever.com/Selena/Houston_Chronicle_Selena.html (September 9, 2005); Joe Nick Patoski, *Selena: Como La Flor* (Little, Brown & Co., 1996), excerpted in "Tejano Idol Fashioned a Career," *San Antonio Express-News*, March 24, 1996; and "Selena Biography," http://www.selenaforever.com/Selenamusic/selena_biography.html (September 9, 2005).

² From an interview by Cito de la Torre and Nancy Rodriguez published in *La Prensa*, April 16, 1995, online http://www.selenaforever.com/SelenaInterviews/Selena_Interview_1.html (September 9, 2005).

³ From an interview by Walter Martinez published in *Latin Style Magazine*, 1995, online http://www.selenaforever.com/SelenaInterviews/Selena_Interview_2.html (September 9, 2005).

⁴ Quoted by Mitchell, *Houston Chronicle*, May 21, 1995, online.

⁵ From "Dexord fans recall the music of fallen star," *San Antonio Express-News*, March 31, 2005, p. 1E. Visit the Gallery of Great Texas Women website for additional resources: <http://www.utexas.edu/gtw/>