

Jose Feliciano Biography

FELICIANO: A Name That is Synonymous with MUSIC.

It is synonymous with an international presence that has influenced popular music for more than two generations. It is synonymous with a presence that has bridged musical styles in a way that has never been equaled. Jose Feliciano is recognized as the first Latin Artist to cross over into the English music market, opening the doors to others who now play an important part in the American music industry.

As importantly, Feliciano has been acclaimed by critics throughout the world as “*The greatest living guitarist*”. Referred to as “*The Picasso of his Realm*,” Jose Feliciano’s accolades are repeatedly celebrated. Guitar Player Magazine awarded him “*Best Pop Guitarist*,” placing him in their “*Gallery of the Greats*,” and he’s been voted both Best Jazz and Best Rock Guitarist in the Playboy Magazine reader’s poll, as well. He’s been awarded over forty-five Gold and Platinum records; has won sixteen Grammy nominations, earning him eight Grammy Awards and is in receipt of countless prestigious awards the world over.

In 1996, Jose Feliciano was selected to receive Billboard Magazine’s Lifetime Achievement Award and New York City honored him by re-naming Public School 155 in East Harlem, “*The Jose Feliciano Performing Arts School*.” And In 2001, Jose received a Doctor of Humane Letters degree from Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut, for his musical, as well as humanitarian, contributions to the world.

Being constantly in demand, Jose has performed for and with some of the most important people on Earth. He enjoys playing with many of the top symphonic orchestras including the London Symphony, the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Vienna Symphony Orchestra. He’s appeared on major television shows worldwide; he has done a number of his own specials and his music has been featured on television, in films and on the stage.

Jose was born blind, to humble beginnings on September 10, 1945, in Lares, Puerto Rico. One of eleven boys, his love affair with music began at the age of three when he first accompanied his uncle on a tin cracker can. When he was five, his family immigrated to New York City. Young Jose learned to play the concertina at age six, using a handful of records as his teacher. At eight, he performed for his classmates at PS 57, and at nine, performed at The Puerto Rican Theater in the Bronx. Venturing beyond the accordion, he taught himself to play the guitar with undaunted determination and again, with nothing but records as his teacher, practicing for as many as 14 hours a day. Exposed to the rock-n-roll of the 50’s, Jose was then inspired to sing.

At 17, Jose quit school. His father was not working at the time and he needed to help his family. He played in coffee houses in Greenwich Village and for his salary -- as was customary during that time period in small clubs -- they’d “pass the hat”. He played his first professional engagement that same year in Detroit, Michigan. Shortly thereafter, a music critic writing of his performance at Gerde’s Folk City, referred to him as a “10-fingered wizard who romps, runs, rolls, picks and reverberates his six strings in an incomparable fashion.” And added, “If you want to witness the birth of a star, catch Mr. Feliciano before he leaves tomorrow night.”

Jose’s first major break in the industry, however, happened in the Spanish market when, in 1966, after an amazing performance at the Mar del Plata Festival in Argentina, the RCA executives in Buenos Aires encouraged Jose to stay there and record an album of Spanish music. “They really didn’t know what to do with me in the studio,” Jose recalls. “So I suggested that we record a number of old boleros--songs I had heard from the time I was a kid.” Feliciano’s interpretation of the classic bolero of the time was revolutionary. The first single, “Poquita Fe”, was a ‘smash’ hit and “Usted” was even bigger.

Jose had taken long-time standards and made them brand new. He re-worked and re-fashioned them with his own style of acoustic guitar and with the vocal inflections of his jazz and American influences that he had acquired during his adolescence. Without question, Jose was the “teen idol” of the day, unable to pass through airports or leave his hotel room without a riot.

Two more albums followed in similar fashion and the name Jose Feliciano was known all throughout South and Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean. Then, the RCA exec’s in Los Angeles coupled him with producer, Rick Jarrard, who recommended that Jose record a Doors’ song that he’d heard him sing recently in concert -- a tune called, “Light My Fire”...

By the time he was 23, Jose Feliciano had earned five Grammy nominations and won two Grammy Awards for his album “Feliciano!”, he had performed over much of the world, and had recorded songs in four languages. But Jose was not satisfied. He had a desire to expand his career to include some acting and during the next few years, had made a number of dramatic TV appearances, including an episode of “Kung Fu”, “Macmillan and Wife” and “Chico and the Man”. “It was a lot of fun,” recalls Jose, “But I’m a musician...” A musician, indeed.

Three songs that have been milestones for Feliciano are: 1) “Light My Fire”, which was number one on the charts in 1968 and according to the song publisher, is now a “standard” due to Jose’s interpretation. 2) “Che Sara”, a mega-success in Europe, Asia and South America and of course, 3) “Feliz Navidad”, the Christmas song that has now become a tradition worldwide during the holiday season every year. In fact, it has become a top iTunes download and ASCAP has placed it among the 25 Greatest Holiday Songs of the Century.

Moreover, the world has enjoyed many Feliciano songs, including: “Rain”, “Chico and the Man”, “California Dreamin’”, “Destiny”, “Affirmation”, “Ay Cariño”, “Ponte A Cantar”, “Cuando El Amor Se Acaba”, “Porque Te Tengo Que Olvidar?”, and countless others. Feliciano’s contributions to the music industry have been far reaching -- spanning generations and continents while emphasizing cultural diversity and mutual acceptance, enhanced significantly by his unsurpassed musical integrity. When Jose made a cameo appearance in the Academy Award Winning motion picture “Fargo” in 1995, he performed one such important self-penned composition, entitled, “Let’s Find Each Other Tonight”, demonstrating his strengths as a songwriter as well as a performer.

One of Jose’s most memorable moments came on December 1, 1987 when he joined other entertainment legends in having his star permanently implanted on the world renowned Hollywood Walk of Fame. Similarly, he’s also been given a star on the Walk of Fame in his native Puerto Rico alongside Jose Ferrer and Raul Julia and had his hands cast for the world famous Wall of Fame in Madame Tussaud’s in London, England.

From a historical point of view, it should be noted that Jose was the first artist to ever stylize the National Anthem and perform it publicly. He did so during the 5th game of the World Series between the Detroit Tigers and St. Louis Cardinals on October 7, 1968 in historic Tiger Stadium. It was the first time the anthem became a charted Top-40 recording and once again, Jose opened the door for new generations of stylization. Today, the national anthem is rarely sung in its strictly traditional form; ever since Jose's extraordinary performance caught the attention of the world by surprise.

As noted earlier, Feliciano has oftentimes ventured into other artistic genres, and in 1989, was invited by legendary author, Ray Bradbury, to write the music to his play, "The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit." Jose and his wife, Susan, took on the challenge of writing over a dozen songs for the project. It was a delightful experience and the thrill of a lifetime to work alongside one of the literary world's greatest writers, Mr. Bradbury. The production enjoyed a successful run at the Pasadena Playhouse and was well received by the media and patrons of California's State Theater.

Jose and Susan have been together since 1971. In 1988 they were blessed with a daughter, Melissa Anne, in 1991 with their first son, Jonathan Jose and in 1995, with their third child, Michael Julian. Together they live in a 275+ year-old former tavern-turned-homestead on a river in Fairfield County, Connecticut. It's lively, even noisy at times; the perfect place for an active household like the Feliciano Family! When Jose is home, his time is spent writing and recording in his studio, enjoying baseball -- both playing and listening to on the radio -- and being a dad!

In the early 90's, Jose indulged himself a little by staying closer to home, enjoying his young family and trying his hand at a life-long dream-- "to be on the air!!" The local Westport, Connecticut radio station, WMMM, became the instrument for this desire. Its general manager, Mark Graham, and Jose had a Saturday morning talk show entitled, "Speaking of Music", where they would chat together, share musical tidbits and trivia, interview musical artists and play an array of music from jazz to the rock 'n' roll of the 50's and early 60's to pop and more. The community embraced their collaboration and the show continued for well over a year until Jose's touring schedule simply couldn't afford the time it took to broadcast a weekly show.

Over the years, Jose has been a part of many historic events. He has shared the stage with other internationally renowned artists, for example, at an event where he co-headlined with Paul Simon and James Taylor at the internationally acclaimed 'Back To The Ranch Benefit' on Long Island for an estimated twelve thousand people.

Fondly, Jose also recalls his appearances on the Motown 25 Extravaganza, the PBS Television Concert Special entitled, "The Kennedy Center Presents - The Americanos Concert", the "Lady Liberty Concert" in New York, the Christmas Tree lighting ceremony in Washington, D.C. and party at the White House, just to name a very few. Jose recognizes his great fortune, as well, in having met some of the world's most important artists, writers, scientists, sports figures, heads-of-state, royal figures and, among his greatest honors, an invitation to Rome to participate in "Christmas at the Vatican" and his private audience with Pope John Paul II.

Throughout the late 90's there were numerous TV specials in which Jose appeared around the world. He performed throughout the USA and Canada as well as England, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Australia, The Philippines, Chile, Argentina and Brazil. There was no sign of slowing down or resting on his laurels...in fact, Jose felt he was just getting started.

In the fall of 1997, PolyGram released Jose's most important recording in many years, entitled, "SEÑOR BOLERO". This album marked a return to his musical roots. Having revolutionized the sound of the bolero early in his career, he rose to a new standard with this classic and very romantic torch song, for which he had long been associated.

PolyGram had designed an elaborate promotional campaign to underscore this most exciting collection of boleros and had plans on releasing between four and six singles from the album. Public response was absolutely phenomenal and in the first two weeks of its release, it had out-sold the previous Spanish album, which had, at that time, been out for two years. The first single from "Señor Bolero," Me Has Echado Al Olvido, shot straight to number one in New York and in countries throughout Central and South America. In less than six weeks after the release of Señor Bolero, it had earned platinum status in the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

Shortly thereafter, it was nominated by NARAS for Best Latin Pop Album of the year, marking Jose's sixteenth nomination. "Señor Bolero" attained DOUBLE PLATINUM status in The United States, Puerto Rico and Venezuela and GOLD in Mexico, Cost Rica and Argentina. A sequel followed with a similar excitement along with a new plan to explore other genres of music in the future.

Jose Feliciano entered this new Millennium with great impact: Los Premios Globos honored him with a tremendous accolade: "Artist of the Millennium Award" and he received the Alma Award for Lifetime Achievement. These new honors joined an ever-increasing collection of mementos that line the walls of his recording studio and bring to his visitors a sense of awe. They see first-hand, the history of the great love shown to him by his admirers from around the world and an industry which has embraced him for 50 years!

In 2005, a unique CD for Universal Latino was comprised with a collection of Mexican Mariachis, and was entitled, "A Mexico...con Amor." In it Jose expressed his enduring affection for the people and music of Mexico in much the same way that he illuminated the beauty of the bolero throughout his career. With the orchestral arrangements of Jose Hernandez, it has proven to be a stunning collection of cherished Mexican standards, presented in a contemporary manner -- delighting listeners from Mexico to Morocco and from Melbourne to Miami.

During this time in his life, Feliciano started finding himself turning more and more toward the corporate world with invitations to appear as a motivational speaker, role model and personality for a variety of industry icons from Nissan Automobile Company of Japan to Citibank.

Also, he was pleased to bring information and insight to Latinos with diabetes by joining hands with the people from Life Scan, Inc. in becoming their spokesperson for the One Touch Glucose Monitoring System throughout North America. He was pleased to know that since his association with them, reported cases of Hispanics with diabetes had increased three-fold and more, because of his encouraging words to "get tested and stay healthy."

In September 2006, The Hispanic Heritage Foundation, an organization that identifies, inspires, promotes and prepares Latino role models through national leadership, cultural, educational and workforce programs, honored Jose with their prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. Having joined past recipients including Oscar de la Renta, Celia Cruz and Raul Julia, Jose was both honored and humbled by the display of affection shown him at the Gala and NBC and Telemundo television broadcasts. During the same time, Jose was again, in high spirits as he had the opportunity to work on another Spanish language CD with Rudy Perez. Rudy, of course, is the celebrated producer/friend/mentor who, for many years and on numerous occasions, has sat next to Jose in the studio control room as producer on some of Jose's very favorite and most successful albums. Though a rookie back in the eighties when they first began their association, Rudy has gone on to become one of the hottest, most influential names in the music industry and so a reunion like this one was always a reason to celebrate.

That project entitled, "Jose Feliciano y Amigos," became a collection of songs from the past as well as present, many recorded with artists that Jose, personally, invited to join him, including Christian Castro, Luis Fonsi, Marc Anthony, Luciano Pereyra, Lupillo Rivera, Raúl Di Blasio and others.

The album was released by Siente Music, a new label developed through a partnership between Venevision International and Universal Music Latino. The two entertainment giants forged a partnership and entered the record arena with great success, so Jose was delighted to be associated with this dynamic machine. Its first single, "Que Nadie Sepa Mi Sufir," with Alicia Villarreal, was a striking example of the album's high caliber and was warmly welcomed by radio listeners.

On the tails of the Amigos CD, Siente Music wanted to stretch the limits a bit further and so enlisted Jose's participation in an album of yet another musical genre: The Bachata - the typical countryside music of the Dominicans. It was categorized in that now-familiar theme -- that of Feliciano's popular "Señor Series" -- and was entitled, "Señor Bachata!"

Leila Cobo from Billboard.com put it so well when she recently wrote:

"It's always a challenge to take an artist out of his or her established format and plunge him or her into another. So it's a tribute to José Feliciano's artistry that he's able to navigate pop and tropical idioms with ease, and that his foray into Bachata—perhaps the genre most alien to his long recording history—is convincing to the musician and the style. The album title is a nod to Feliciano's previous "Señor Bolero," which found him singing bolero standards. Here, he does the same with Dominican Bachata, pairing up with Dominican icon Millie Quezada, but also with salsa singer La India and urban/reggaetón duo Rakim & Ken-Y for a more youthful feel. Feliciano departs from Bachata on his own compositions, but "Qué Le Estará Pasando a Puerto Rico" makes up for it with fine guitar lines and a catchy final descarga."

To make this an even more exciting and important release for Jose and the music industry, "Señor Bachata!" was awarded TWO GRAMMY AWARDS in 2008: for "Best Contemporary Tropical Album" by LARAS, the Latin Association of Recording Arts and Sciences and "Best Tropical Album" by NARAS, the National Association of Recording Arts and Sciences. This brings a total of 19 nominations and 8 awards given to Jose by the combined arms of the Recording Academy.

Each time Jose returns home from the road after having been on either a concert tour or a promotional junket or a mission of good will, he returns home to his personal recording studio. It is there where he unwinds, recharges and creates his music. There's no other place on Earth where he finds the peace and contentment that he so needs as an artist. His longevity and vitality are evidence of this fact. In this environment, he created a special album, "The Soundtrax of My Life," a totally unique recording of original material, that is completely his own: organic and personal.

Recorded over a period of five years, it is completely self-penned and produced and was recorded at home where he was able to hone a special piece of music: a body of work that reflects the innermost emotions of this iconic personality, this artist who has become a legend during his lifetime. "The Soundtrax of My Life" is Jose Feliciano's very personal musical expression and one of his greatest musical accomplishments.

2008 saw Jose traveling to all corners of the globe: from India to Brazil and from Australia to Germany. Having visited over eighty countries across the face of the Earth for more than two generations, his current itinerary proves that he has no intention of slowing down anytime soon and 2009 will be no different.

Jose's gifts of time, treasure and talent have earned him, over the years, the reputation of great humanitarian and "Ambassador of Good Will" throughout the world. "I'll never forget where I came from or the people who helped my family or me along the way". For this reason, Jose will often lend a hand or his name in support of causes that he believes are important. Even though Jose has recorded nearly 70 albums in his impressive career he is still humble with all the successes he has had and, remarkably, feels that he has just started to share his talents with the world.