

Fotos y Recuerdos: Remembering the Life and Music of Selena Quintanilla-Pérez

By David Flores, Advised by Dr. Sarah M. Lucas

Texas A&M University-Kingsville, School of Music

ABSTRACT

Selena Quintanilla-Pérez (1971–1995), often hailed as the “Queen of Tejano Music,” occupies various spaces in American popular culture. While her legacy has been explored through media, fan culture, and cultural studies, her music remains underexamined in musicological discourse. This project seeks to recenter Selena’s musical output by approaching it through an interdisciplinary lens, combining musicological analysis with other preestablished theories. Specifically, this research asks: Which musical elements characterize the diverse genres represented in Selena’s repertoire? In what ways do re-released versions of Selena’s songs, presented in varying styles, resonate with and appeal to different audience segments? How does Selena’s fusion of Tejano and American musical styles reflect and shape bicultural identity in her audience? How do contemporary audiences reinterpret Selena’s musical legacy to construct a shared cultural identity among Latinos today? By analyzing her music alongside contemporary fan interpretations, this study aims to uncover how Selena’s artistry continues to resonate with the Latino experience. Through this approach, the project contributes to a deeper understanding of how musical performance operates within bilingual, bicultural, and transnational communities in America.

WHO WAS SELENA?

- April 16, 1971–March 31, 1995
- Born in Freeport, Texas to Abraham and Marcella Quintanilla
- Raised in Lake Jackson, Texas, before relocating to the city of Corpus Christi
- Began singing with Selena Y Los Dinos around the age of nine at PapaGayo’s, her family's restaurant
- Known as the “Queen of Tejano”
- Married to Chris Pérez, the guitarist for her band
- Grammy Award for Best Mexican-American Album (1994)
- Murdered by her fan club president and boutique manager, Yolanda Saldivar

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Scholarship on Selena spans cultural studies, media studies, sociology, and musicology.
- She is widely studied as a symbol of Latinidad, gender, race, and bicultural identity.
- Her fusion of Tejano, pop, and R&B reflects her cross-cultural appeal.
- Researchers analyze her voice, image, and emotional connection with audiences.
- Concepts like *Selenidad* frame her legacy as a shared cultural memory.
- Media portrayals and public mourning highlight her ongoing cultural relevance.
- Fans play an active role in sustaining her presence through digital platforms.
- While cultural analysis is strong, musicological studies remain limited.
- There is a need for deeper exploration of her musical contributions and her fans' connection to her music on a personal level.
- Selena’s lasting influence bridges academic, artistic, and popular spaces.

METHODOLOGY

- Selection of songs from Selena’s discography: “Besitos” from *Selena* (1989), “No Me Queda Mas” from *Amor Prohibido* (1994), and “Missing my Baby” from *Entre a Mi Mundo* (1992) and *Dreaming of You* (1995).
- Translate Spanish lyrics to English and conduct a lyrical and thematic analysis of the chosen songs.
- Use the Western music theory system to analyze the harmonic and rhythmic characteristics of the music to better classify the songs’ genre, style, and influences.
- Analyze the different reception of the re-released track “Missing my Baby” from both *Entre a Mi Mundo* and *Dreaming of You*.

ANALYSIS

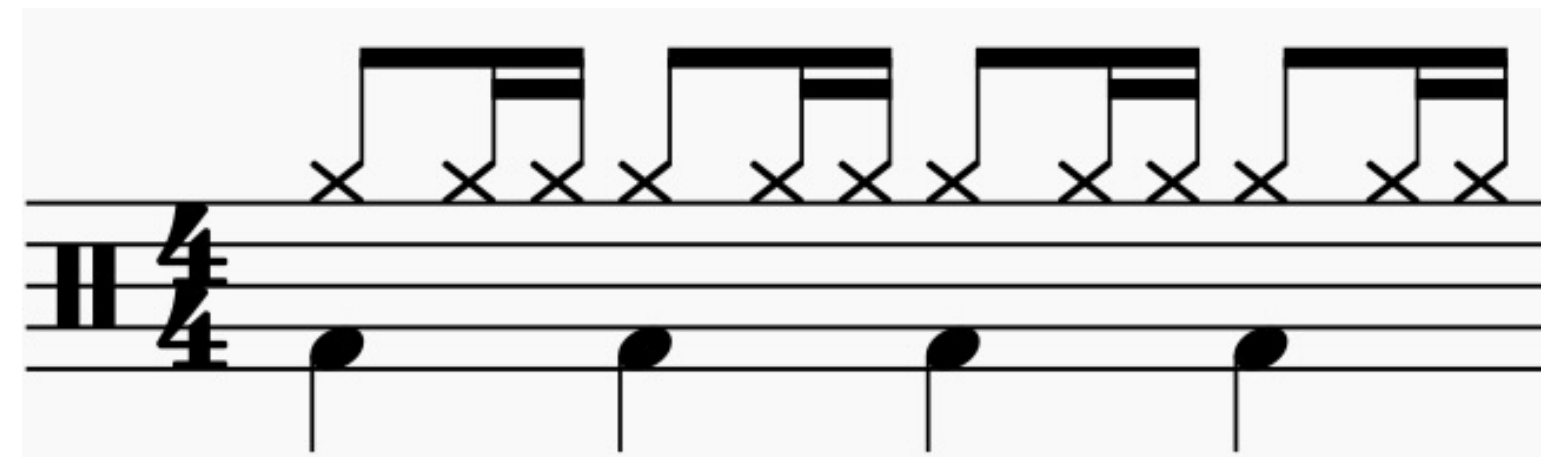


Figure 1. Standard rhythm of a Spanish cumbia. Present in the song “Besitos,” as well as many other songs from her discography.



Figure 2. Bolero style rhythmic patterns from the armonia (guitar and bass) comes from mariachi style music. This excerpt comes from Selena’s song “No Me Queda Mas.”

Differences in “Missing my Baby” Releases

Data Point	“Missing my Baby” (1992)	“Missing my Baby” (1995)
Album Title	<i>Entre a Mi Mundo</i>	<i>Dreaming of You</i>
Album Charts	19 weeks at No. 1 on US Regional Mexican Albums chart	One week at No. 1 on Billboard 200 (as an album)

Figure 3. Comparison of both releases of “Missing my Baby” according to the charting history of their respective albums.

RESULTS

- Selena’s music contains an array of styles from both Latin and American influences, ranging from mariachi music to R&B.
- Tejano music, and its artists, are not tied to one particular sound, but instead to the styles that make them both Mexican and American.
- Re-releasing music in updated styles, as in the case of 'Missing My Baby,” can help broaden a song’s appeal to a wider audience.
- The song “Besitos” helped launch Selena’s career and paved the way for later hits like “Techno Cumbia” and “Baila Esta Cumbia.”
- Further studying: How do Latino audiences connect to Selena’s music on a personal level?

CONCLUSION

A Mix of Latin and American Sounds

- Selena’s music showcases a dynamic fusion of Latin and American genres.

- Her success in styles ranging from mariachi to R&B reflects the diversity within Tejano music.

- Tejano music resists a fixed definition; it thrives in its cultural hybridity.

- Selena acts as a key figure in understanding how bicultural identity shapes musical expression.

For Future Research

- Conduct interviews with Selena fans to explore how her music connects to their cultural identity and heritage.

- Analyze additional songs that were re-released or influenced by American popular music to understand how her sound evolved across audiences.

- Investigate how Selena’s music continues to shape perceptions of Tejano and bicultural identity in contemporary contexts.

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