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Celiabrating

Books and More

BY CARLOS QUEIRÓS

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Even death could not halt her success. The world lost the Queen of Salsa on July 16, 2003, yet Celia Cruz's legacy lives on. Her memorial services, befitting royalty, were a testament to a career that included more than 70 albums and countless awards. She inspired millions of artists and fans.

Her *alma* was felt at the 2004 Billboard Latin Music Awards, where she was posthumously presented with Top Latin Albums Artist of the Year, Female Tropical Album of the Year, and Latin Greatest Hits Album of the Year.

“¡Azúcar! The Life and Music of Celia Cruz” will open in May at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History. The exhibit will highlight Cruz's life and career through photographs; costumes, for which she was especially known; and other personal artifacts. If the Smithsonian is not on your itinerary, two recently published books allow you to experience the phenomenon that was Celia Cruz.

In [Presenting Celia Cruz](#) (Clarkson Potter, 2004), longtime friend and Cuban American photographer Alexis Rodríguez-Duarte, in collaboration with Tico Torres, celebrates the singer through a harmonious blend of words and images. Rodríguez-Duarte met her in 1988 while he and Torres were living in London and saw a poster for a Celia Cruz concert. Anxious to meet her, he tracked down her hotel room number and called. Cruz invited him for tea the following afternoon and during that meeting offered him VIP backstage passes to her concert. For the next 15 years, Rodríguez-Duarte would share great times with Cruz and capture iconic images of her on film.

The book is a tribute to their relationship. A clean design and bilingual format complement a wonderful photographic narrative. The decision to offer the book in English and Spanish was fueled by Rodríguez-Duarte's belief that the exuberance of Cruz's music is something felt by speakers of both languages. He also wanted to

more

[the grace of celia cruz \(verano 2003\)](#)

[celia cruz: queen of salsa \(primavera 2002\)](#)

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make clear the book is not just “a Latino thing, since Celia didn’t just belong to Latinos.” This is evident throughout the book, in which artist Annie Lennox—not usually associated with Hispanic music—wishes she were fluent in Spanish so she could have sung a duet with Cruz. Marc Anthony, Jennifer Lopez, David Byrne, Christina Saralegui, and Andy Garcia also offer tributes. While working on the book, Rodríguez-Duarte says he realized that he started photographing Cruz when she was already in her 60s, “but you don’t see her age when you see the photographs. You see her energy, her laughter, her smile....That’s the first thing that comes across.”

In the prologue to *Celia: My Life* (Rayo, 2004), writer Ana Christina Reymundo recalls: “In 1960 my mother worked in the coat check at Los Globos and I used to hide under the rods where the fabulous furs and shawls of the elite clientele were hung. In the midst of French cologne and Cuban tobacco, I snoozed peacefully, lulled by drums and Celia.” Who would have thought that 42 years later she would interview Cruz and have the privilege of participating in the writing of her memoirs? The book is the singer’s story in her own words—from her birth and family life in Cuba, through her musical career and loving relationship with Pedro Knight, her best friend and husband. Each chapter begins with a photograph. The candid writing is sure to keep readers turning the pages.

As Rodríguez-Duarte says: “Celia was universal and belonged to the people.”

Go behind the scenes with Celia Cruz, as her former publicist shares his personal insights in his [tribute to the “Queen of Salsa.”](#)

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