Newsletter

A vision of Latin America and the Caribbean countries

11 August 2025

Weekly Newsletter covering Latin America and the Caribbean issues. A Project between Green Zone Foundation and teleSUR.

Juan Luis Guerra: Architect of a New Dominican Sound and Global Icon of Latin Music

Juan Luis Guerra stands as one of the most influential and innovative figures in Latin American music. Rooted in the rhythms of merengue and bachata, his artistic journey has reshaped the Dominican musical landscape and earned him a place among the most respected composers worldwide.

As a composer, arranger, lyricist, bandleader of 440, and a man of deep values, Guerra's career reflects not only musical excellence but also a profound commitment to social causes. His body of work places him alongside legendary Latin songwriters such as Silvio Rodríguez, Pablo Milanés, Violeta Parra, Joan Manuel Serrat, and Armando Manzanero.



His songs—“Ojalá que llueva café,” “Burbujas de amor,” “La bilirrubina,” “Frío frío,” “Visa para un sueño,” “Tus besos,” “La llave de mi corazón”—have become timeless anthems, celebrated for their lyrical depth and musical richness. These compositions form part of the global canon of Latin music and continue to resonate across generations.

Guerra’s talent has been recognized in prestigious international competitions, including the OTI Festival, where his songs “De tu boca” and “Te ofrezco” won top honors, performed by Taty Salas and Maridalia Hernández, respectively. His discography includes 13 studio albums and over 20 compilations, with more than 30 million records sold.

His accolades include 18 Latin Grammy Awards, 2 Grammy Awards, and 2 Latin Billboard Awards. In 2007, Guerra made history by winning six Latin Grammys for his album La llave de mi corazón, including Album of the Year, Song of the Year, and Person of the Year—an honor shared with icons like Shakira, Juanes, and Gloria Estefan.

Major artists across the globe have recorded his songs, including Luis Miguel, Ana Belén, Gilberto Santa Rosa, Daniela Mercury, Romeo Santos, Diego Torres, and Enrique Iglesias.

Guerra’s humanitarian work through the Juan Luis Guerra Foundation earned him Billboard’s Spirit of Hope Award in 2005 and Premio Lo Nuestro’s Excellence Award in 2007. He was also named BMI Icon, recognizing his influence on generations of Latin music creators.

Newsletter

A vision of Latin America and the Caribbean countries

11 August 2025

Weekly Newsletter covering Latin America and the Caribbean issues. A Project between Green Zone Foundation and teleSUR.

Academically trained at Berklee College of Music, Guerra has been honored by the institution multiple times, including being named one of its top 50 alumni and receiving a scholarship in his name for underprivileged Latin students. In 2006, he was voted Best Latin Student by Berklee's Latin student body and performed at the school's 60th anniversary concert.

His concerts have reached millions of fans in over 60 countries, filling stadiums and prestigious venues worldwide. He has shared stages with Latin legends like Juanes, Carlos Vives, and Alejandro Sanz, and international icons such as The Rolling Stones, Sting, and Paul Simon.

Guerra revolutionized merengue, elevating it from a dance-centric genre to one of literary and social depth. His "440 style" blends traditional Dominican rhythms with jazz, pop, and African percussion, creating a merengue "for the feet and the mind." Songs like "El costo de la vida" and "El Niágara en bicicleta" exemplify this transformation.

He introduced innovative elements to merengue, such as the prominent use of guitar, jazz-influenced brass phrasing, and modern chorus arrangements inspired by The Beatles and Manhattan Transfer. These changes gave merengue a contemporary sound while preserving its cultural essence.

Juan Luis Guerra's legacy is one of artistic brilliance, cultural pride, and humanitarian impact. His ability to merge tradition with innovation has not only redefined Dominican music but also positioned him as a global ambassador of Latin sound and conscience.

Published by teleSUR 7 August, 2025

Newsletter

A vision of Latin America and the Caribbean countries

11 August 2025

Weekly Newsletter covering Latin America and the Caribbean issues. A Project between Green Zone Foundation and teleSUR.

Elpidio Valdes: Cuba's Fight For Independence as a Cartoon

When the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC) released the locally acclaimed film Elpidio Valdés vs. The Military Train in 1974, it was almost five years since the iconic character Elpidio Valdés first appeared as a cartoon in a children's magazine. Now, this beloved character is celebrating his 55th anniversary.

Elpidio is the main hero of one of Cuba's most iconic and enduring animated series. As a mambí, he embodies the struggles of an island that had to fight against Spanish colonialism, specifically in the 19th century.



Yet, his creator, Juan Padron, approaches this serious topic through the lens of satire, prioritizing entertainment over historical lecture. Still, thanks to Elpidio's widespread recognition and acclaim across the Caribbean nation, the character plays a valuable role in introducing children to Cuba's national history.

His debut comic strip was announced on the cover of the then-weekly children's magazine Pionero, issue 305, on August 4, 1970, and appeared in the following edition.

Week after week, filling entire pages, the character steadily gained followers. Then came Elpidio Valdes vs. The Ninjas — announced in issue 333 — which gradually became a lasting part of the imagination of young audiences: a different kind of hero, without a cape or traditional superpowers, but armed with a machete—a symbol of the Cuban wars for independence against the Kingdom of Spain—and plenty of cunning.

The creator himself, also the author of several other cult classics like Vampires in Havana, had previously made a very different comic for the samurai Kashibashi, which happened to feature a 19th-century Cuban mambí. "I named him Elpidio Valdés to echo Cecilia Valdes, and I drew him on the first try without any sketch," Padrón once explained.

Although the Japanese samurai was the original protagonist, he noticed that the speech bubbles related to Elpidio were much more engaging. “So, I scrapped the 12 pages I had sketched and rewrote the entire story with Elpidio as the main character,” he added.

And just like that, fifty-five years ago, thanks to Padron’s choice, one of Cuba’s most cherished popular culture characters was born.

Published by teleSUR 5 August, 2025

Newsletter

A vision of Latin America and the Caribbean countries

11 August 2025

Weekly Newsletter covering Latin America and the Caribbean issues. A Project between Green Zone Foundation and teleSUR.

Drums of Resistance: The Living Pulse of Uruguay's Candombe

Born of the African diaspora and shaped in the streets of Montevideo, Candombe continues to echo stories of struggle, pride, and cultural resilience through the beat of its drums.

Every weekend, in neighborhoods like Barrio Sur and Palermo in Montevideo, the echo of drums fills the air. The sound isn't just music—it's memory, heritage, and resistance. This is Candombe, a cultural expression born from the African diaspora in Uruguay that has become a vital part of the country's identity.



Newsletter

A vision of Latin America and the Caribbean countries

11 August 2025

Weekly Newsletter covering Latin America and the Caribbean issues. A Project between Green Zone Foundation and teleSUR.

Recognized by UNESCO in 2009 as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, Candombe has deep roots in the history of Afro-Uruguayans. It emerged from the fusion of African traditions brought by enslaved peoples and the everyday life of urban Montevideo. Today, its rhythms remain inseparable from the streets where it evolved.

Candombe is performed with three types of drums: the chico (small), which keeps a steady pulse; the repique (medium), which adds improvisational flourishes; and the piano (large), which lays down the deep base. Despite its name, this piano is no keyboard—it's the biggest drum, and its resonant beat gives the rhythm its weight.

Far from being confined to folklore festivals, Candombe lives on in daily life. On weekends and holidays, families and neighbors gather in comparsas—community drum ensembles—to rehearse, march, and celebrate. These gatherings, especially during the "llamadas" parades in February, are both communal and political: a space for visibility and pride among Uruguay's Afro-descendant population.

Though small in numbers, Uruguay's Afro-descendant communities have kept Candombe alive through decades of marginalization. Today, it's a cultural beacon not just of music and dance, but of belonging, continuity, and resistance. The beat of the drums carries a message that transcends generations: "We are still here."

Published by teleSUR 4 August, 2025

Newsletter

A vision of Latin America and the Caribbean countries

11 August 2025

Weekly Newsletter covering Latin America and the Caribbean issues. A Project between Green Zone Foundation and teleSUR.

Soca Dance: The Caribbean Rhythm That Took the World by Storm

In the summer of 1990, “Soca Dance” by Charles D. Lewis burst onto the European music scene, blending infectious Caribbean rhythms with a danceable pop sensibility that made it an instant hit. Originally featured on Lewis’s album Do You Feel It, the song was propelled into the spotlight when TF1, a major French television channel, chose it as the successor to the previous year’s tropical sensation, Lambada. The goal: to create another summer anthem that captured the exotic energy of the Caribbean.



- France: The song soared to number one and earned a Gold certification, selling over 400,000 copies. It remains one of the country's top-selling singles, ranked 495th in all-time sales.
- Belgium: Also reached number one, confirming its cross-border appeal.
- Germany: Peaked at #10, showing strong performance in Central Europe.
- Austria: Climbed to #30, adding to its continental reach.

"Soca Dance" was released in multiple formats—7″ singles, maxi singles, and cassette editions—making it widely accessible during its peak popularity. Its lyrics, though simple, carried a sensual and celebratory tone, perfectly aligned with the festive spirit of summer.

In 1993, Puerto Rican pop star Chayanne recorded a Spanish-language version titled "Socca Dance" for his album Provócame. This adaptation featured lyrics by renowned songwriter Diane Warren, with Spanish translation by Honorio Herrero and Gustavo Sánchez. Chayanne's version introduced the song to Latin American audiences, further cementing its international legacy.

"Soca Dance" is more than a one-hit wonder—it's a reflection of how Caribbean music, particularly soca, found a place in mainstream European pop culture. Its success paved the way for other tropical genres to gain visibility and appreciation beyond their regional origins.

Published by teleSUR 7 August, 2025

Newsletter

A vision of Latin America and the Caribbean countries

11 August 2025

Weekly Newsletter covering Latin America and the Caribbean issues. A Project between Green Zone Foundation and teleSUR.

The Weavers of Taquile: Preserving a Unique Textile Heritage on Lake Titicaca

Taquile Island in Peru sustains a unique male-led weaving tradition that encodes social identity and community memory, recognized by UNESCO and maintained through collective effort despite modern pressures.

Taquile Island, located on Peru's Andean high plateau within Lake Titicaca, is renowned for its distinctive textile tradition, recognized by UNESCO in 2008 as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (initially proclaimed in 2005).



Newsletter

A vision of Latin America and the Caribbean countries

11 August 2025

Weekly Newsletter covering Latin America and the Caribbean issues. A Project between Green Zone Foundation and teleSUR.

This Quechua-speaking community of approximately 2,000 inhabitants preserves weaving techniques, symbols, and knowledge inherited from pre-Incan civilizations such as the Pukara, Colla, and Inca cultures, expressed in every handcrafted piece.

Relatively isolated from the mainland until the mid-20th century, Taquile has maintained strong communal bonds and a system of collective decision-making. This social structure is fundamental to the preservation and vitality of its textile heritage.

Textiles are produced by hand or on traditional foot-operated looms, following ancestral methods and designs. Among the most emblematic pieces is the chullo, a knitted hat with ear flaps designed to protect against the cold Andean climate. The colors and patterns of the chullo communicate social information: unmarried men wear brightly colored, elaborately patterned hats, while married men wear simpler, more subdued designs. Variations also indicate age and social roles within the community, making textiles a complex visual language.

Another significant piece is the calendar belt, a wide sash depicting the agricultural and ceremonial cycles of the year. This belt acts as a symbolic archive of Taquile's oral traditions and history, attracting scholarly interest in the relationship between craft and collective memory. While contemporary symbols have been incorporated over time, traditional styles and techniques remain intact.

Newsletter

A vision of Latin America and the Caribbean countries

11 August 2025

Weekly Newsletter covering Latin America and the Caribbean issues. A Project between Green Zone Foundation and teleSUR.

Knowledge is transmitted through a specialized local school where men and women of all ages learn ancestral techniques. Men primarily weave, using fine needle knitting, while women spin wool and prepare natural dyes. This division of labor reflects a social organization that has endured for generations.

Economically, the community relies heavily on textile production and tourism. The Asociación Comunal de Artesanos San Santiago, a collective trademark granted by Peru's intellectual property office (Indecopi), protects the authenticity of Taquile's products and facilitates direct community sales, eliminating intermediaries. Tourism plays a crucial role in sustaining the tradition, allowing artisans to sell their work through community-managed stores.

However, population growth in recent decades has increased pressure on natural resources, such as pastures for alpaca herding and cultivable land. This has necessitated importing raw materials from the mainland, partially reducing the island's traditional self-sufficiency. The community faces the ongoing challenge of balancing cultural preservation with economic and environmental adaptation.

Despite these changes, weaving remains central to Taquile's identity, social organization, and resilience. It is a living language, a system of social communication, and a means of maintaining ties to land and ancestral heritage.

Published by teleSUR 8 August, 2025