LEARN SPANISH WITH LOVE SONGS

AUTHOR’S PREFACE

“A thing of beauty is a joy forever.” (John Keats, 1795-1821)

The twenty-three songs in this book will delight you. They have been carefully selected for the beauty of their music and the poetic quality of their lyrics. They come mostly from Latin-America although two are from Spain. They cover many aspects of that sometimes very strange thing which mortals call “love”.

Sometimes I hear people say what an easy language Spanish is. Funny, but in my experience none of these people can speak Spanish well. The truth is that it takes a lot of time and effort to acquire a good accent (and sense of rhythm) even in Spanish. Fortunately there are several ways to make this task pleasant: (1) direct contact with native speakers e.g. through a homestay with Spanish speaking hosts; (2) working with the DVDs of a program such as “Destinos”, which has such an interesting story and characters; (3) listening to songs in Spanish and studying their lyrics.

Learn Spanish with Love Songs guides you through twenty-three outstanding love songs. If you listen to them carefully, over and over, hours on end, and say (or better, sing) out loud what you are hearing I can guarantee that your accent will improve. You will also expand your understanding of Spanish: its vocabulary, its constructions, its idioms, and its verbs. Last but not least you will gain insight into the cultures which gave birth to these songs: the value system, the ways people tend to think, (often with idealism and candor) and how they are influenced by such things as history, religion, and geography.

Each of the twenty-three songs in “Learn Spanish with Love Songs” explores a distinctive aspect of that divine madness called “love”. “Solamente una vez” (song 1) contends that you only have one great love in life; “Amor, Amor” (song 2) claims that love comes from God and the soul; “Noche de Ronda” (song 3) reveals a man on a balcony looking up at the moon doing its rounds and wondering if the lady who just left him is doing the same thing; “Quizás? Quizás?” (song 4) is about a lover who is stuck on a girl who is maddeningly commitment-shy; “Cielito Lindo” (song 5) is a warning to men: if you leave the nest and try to return years later don’t be surprised if it is occupied by another man; “Sabor a mí” (song 10) makes the point that lovers who connect at the deepest of levels will be marked by that love forever, even after they part. The tango, “Caminito” (song 11), is the story of a man who returns to the country pathway on which his lady and he used to take walks. Alas! she has gone and he has only the pathway to confide in. “Se me olvidó otra vez “ (song 16) is about losing someone and refusing to leave the old haunts in the vain hope that she will return some day. “Granada” (song 17) is Agustin Lara’s salute to his Spanish heritage and the famous Andalusian city. The other fifteen songs contain many different takes on love. I think you will enjoy them all. My students always have.
In *Learn Spanish with Love Songs* you will find a variety of dance tempos: rumbas/boleros (*Noche de Ronda, Siboney, Quizás? Quizás*?), tangos (*Caminito, Mi Buenos Aires Querido, In Media Luz*), ranchero songs (*Miraron llorar a este hombre*), and even Viennese waltzes (*Cielito Lindo, Granada*). If you like ballroom dancing you will find that understanding the lyrics of the song you are dancing to will enhance your enjoyment and inspire you to interpret the dance with the right feeling. The songs in *Learn Spanish with Love Songs* cover a gamut of countries: Mexico, Panamá, Peru, Argentina, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, Cuba and Spain.

The recording artists whom I prefer are Eydie Gorme (who recorded with the brilliant Trio Los Panchos) Lola Beltrán, Vicente Fernandez, Plácido Domingo and Carlos Gardel but I offer them only as suggestions. As you make your way through the songs in this book take time to listen to other versions: google “Youtube and, for example, “Amor, amor” and it will take you there. Youtube is a treasure trove of wonderful music and all kinds of information connected with songs (the lives of the composers and lyricists, the singers, the genres, etc.)

Note to teachers: Use songs in your program. Students enjoy love songs and learn a lot from them. You will find many teaching ideas throughout this book. Be sure to read the sections “How to approach each song”, “What to look for in a song” and “Suggestions to teachers on presenting songs”. For most songs I have included suggestions on their suitability for teaching things like verb tenses, grammar points and idioms. *Cucurucú, Paloma* (song 8) makes a good exercise on the imperfect tense. *Historia de un amor* (song 9) is useful for illustrating the influence of religion in a culture. *Caminito* (song 10) is a beautiful romantic poem and would fit well in a course on Romantic poetry. *Miraron llorar* (song 12) presents some interesting idioms. *Piel Canela* (song 13) provides an excellent overview of the subjunctive. *Mi Buenos Aires Querido* (song 20) is an interesting introduction to the somewhat dark world of the tanguero. And so on.

Having searched the internet many times for the Spanish words to these songs I have concluded that most versions are unreliable and that the interested reader would welcome an accurate version. This is yet another reason why I wrote this book.

I recommend frequent reviews of those songs which you have already studied. Keep at it and you will have them memorized before you know it. Like all good poetry they will become part of you and enrich your life.

Robert Stuart Thomson, Ph.D.

See my site: [www.godwinbooks.com](http://www.godwinbooks.com) for my writings, especially those which involve studying songs and opera: *Great Songs for the English Classroom* (1980), *Italian for the Opera* (1991), and *Operatic Italian* (2009). My e-mail is rthomson@islandnet.com and you are most welcome to write.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. *Solamente una vez*  Agustin Lara, Mexico, 1935  p. 4  
   Biography of Agustin Lara  p. 6  
   How to approach each song  7
2. *Amor, amor, amor*,  Gabriel Ruiz, Mexico, 1944.  7  
   Biography of Eydie Gorme  9  
   What to look for in a song
3. *Noche de ronda*,  Agustin Lara, Mexico, 1935  10
5. *Cielito Lindo*  Quirino Mendoza y Cortes, Mexico, 1882  14
6. *Angelitos Negros*  Andres Eloy Blanco, Venezuela, 1942  16  
   Terms of endearment in Spanish  16
7. *Siboney*  Ernesto Lecuona, Cuba, 1929  18
8. *Cucurucucú, Paloma*  Tomás Mendez, Mexico, 1927  19
9. *Historia de un amor*  Carlos Almarán, Panamá, 1956  22  
   Lola Beltrán, biography  22  
   Historical origins of song lyrics,  24
10. *Sabor a mí*  Álvaro Carrillo, Mexico, 1959  25
11. *Caminito*  Oscar de Diós Filiberto (music) and Gabino Coria  
    Peñaloza (words), Argentina, 1925  27  
    The strange story of *Caminito*  29
12. *Miraron llorar a esta hombre*  Homero Aquilar Cabrera, Mexico, 1979
    Biography of singer Vincente Fernandez  32
14. *Y (Qué hiciste del amor que me juraste?)*  Javier Solis?? Mexico  34
15. *Di que no es verdad*  Alberto Domínguez, Mexico, 1939  35
16. *Se me olvidó otra vez*  Juan Gabriel, Mexico, 1978  40??
17. *Granada*  Agustin Lara, Mexico, 1932  38??
18. *La Paloma*  Sebastián de Iradier y Salaverri, Spain. 1861  41
19. *Hey!* Composer unknown.  43  
    “Hier Encore” by Charles Aznavour
20. *Mi Buenos Aires Querido,*  C. Gardel and A. Le Pera, Argentina, 1936  47
21. *El Día que me Quieras*  C. Gardel (music) and A. Le Pera, Argentina, 1934  56
22. *In Media Luz*  E. Donato (music) and C. Lenzi (words), Argentina, 1924  53?
23 Que nadie sepa mi sufrir
   Outline of typical features of Latin-American songs
   Suggestions to teachers on how to present songs. 70-75

Below are two sample songs from the book.

12 MIRARON LLORAR A ESTE HOMBRE

   Homer Aquilar Cabrera, Mexico, 1979

   Artist: Vicente Fernandez

1 “Qué caso tiene buscarla? Qué caso tiene seguirla?
   What’s the point in looking for her. What’s the point in following her?

2 De nada vale adorarla si no podré conseguirla.”
   It’s worth nothing to adore her if I won’t be able to get her.

3 Así me dije una noche, mojándome en una esquina.
   Thus I said to myself one night, ‘sousing myself’ in a corner cantina.

4 Después me di media vuelta, tomé por cualquier camino
   Then I did an about turn, I set off on any old road.

5 Quería salir por la puerta que me an vaso de vino.
   I wanted to go out the door that a glass of wine opens for me.

6 Quería arrancarla de mi alma, mandarla por donde vino!
   I wanted to tear her out of my soul, send her to where she came from.

7 El vino agrandó mi pena, la pena sacó mi llanto,
   The wine increased my pain, the pain drew forth my tears,

8 El llanto me abrió la boca, mi boca dijo su nombre.
   The tears opened my mouth, my mouth said her name.
9 Y allí entre copa tras copa, miraron llorar a este hombre.
And there, between one cup after another, they watched this man cry.

Repeat from 4 to 9.

GENERAL NOTES

As I walked through the streets of Puerto Vallarta one night I heard loud ranchera music coming from the second story of a building. It was Vicente Fernandez singing Miraron llorar a este hombre”, a clever song which explores the strange mystery of wine’s power, the crazy quixotic business of continuing to love someone who doesn’t reciprocate your love, and the thoughts of revenge which are fueled by drink. All of this is developed imaginatively in few words.

This song shows the preterite (simple past) used effectively: “dije, di, tome, agrandó, sacó, abrió, dijo, miraron”. There are also some idioms: “qué caso tiene”, “mojar,” and “esquina”.

Learning songs like this one increases your knowledge of Spanish and gives you insight into the Mexican mind or at least the mind of some Mexicans. “Arrancar” (meaning to tear out by the roots) is violent and is a tip-off that underneath the stoical exterior of many Mexican men there lies a volcano. “Las aparéncias engañan.” (Appearances are deceiving, as the Spanish saying goes.) One’s emotions are to be kept hidden. A “real man” can’t be seen crying in public! Caramba! What will people think?

LANGUAGE POINTS

-line 1 “Que caso tiene” is an idiom and defies structural analysis. It means ‘what’s the point?’

-line 2: “De nade vale” is another idiom which defies analysis. It means more or less “what’s the point?”

-The proliferation of verbs in the preterite and the imperfect make this song an excellent exercise in verb tenses.

VICENTE FERNANDEZ

For me the best interpreter of this song is Vicente Fernandez, who was born in 1940 in Huentitán el Alto, Jalisco into an impoverished ranchero family. For economic reasons he had to quit school in grade five and went to work, waiting tables, etc. At age fourteen he placed first in an amateur singing contest in Guadalajara and found his calling, picking up lots of on-site training by singing in restaurants and night clubs. His big break came in 1966 when he was hired by CBS Mexico. This led to recording and movie contracts. His 1974 movie, La Ley del Monte was a huge hit. They made a movie about his life: Historia de un ídolo. As I write this (March 2015) beside a swimming pool in Puerto Vallarta I have to tell you that since I started dying my moustache black I have had five Mexican strangers in the past month alone ask me if I was Vicente Fernandez or at least his brother. No Señor! But I wish! (see photo no. , p. 33 ff.)
INTRODUCTION

1 Granada, tierra soñada por mí,
   Granada, land dreamt of by me,

2 Mi cantar se vuelve gitano
   My song turns into a gypsy

3 cuando es para tí.
   when it is for you

4 Mi cantar, hecho de fantasía,
   My song, (which is) made (i.e. created) of (my) fantasy.

5 Mi cantar, flor de la melancolía
   My song, a flower of melancholy

6 Que yo te vengo a dar.
   That I come to give to you.

VERSE ONE

7 Granada, tierra ensangrentada
   Granada, land steeped in blood

8 en tardes de toros,
   in the afternoons of the corrida,

9 mujer que conserva el embrujo
   (Granada is also) a woman who retains the witchcraft

10 de los ojos moros,
   of moorish eyes,

11 Te sueño rebelde y gitana,
   I dream of you as a rebel and (a) gypsy,
12 cubierta de flores,
covered with flowers,

13 Y beso tu boca de grana,
And I kiss your pomegranate-colored mouth,

14 jugosa manzana
a juicy apple

15 que me habla de amores.
which speaks to me of loves.

VERSE TWO

16 Granada, Manola cantada
Granada, a Manola girl sung

17 En coplas preciosas,
In beautiful couplets,

18 no tengo otra cosa que darte
I have nothing else to give you

19 que un ramo de rosas,
than a bouquet of rosas,

20 de rosas de suave fragrancia
of roses of such sweet fragrance

21 que le dieran marco a la Virgen Morena.
that they could serve as a (picture) frame for the dark holy virgin.

22 Granada, tu tierra está llena
Granada, your land is full

23 De lindas mujeres, de sangre y de sol.
Of pretty women, blood, and sun.

Repeat: 20-23
GENERAL NOTES

In this song Lara pays homage to the Spanish side of Mexican identity, specifically the beauty and rich history of the ancient city of Granada in Andalusia. From verse seven on he uses a kind of impressionistic technique or collage to convey his view of the city’s complexity. It is not surprising to find allusions to Spanish ladies throughout. Lara was ever a lady’s man. Generalissimo Franco appreciated Lara and in 1965 gave him a house in Granada. The Spanish erected a statue to Lara in Madrid. Note the stellar job done by the trumpets in the accompaniment (e.g. in lines 8 and 10). Such flair! The embellishments fittingly suggest the ornate complexity of Moorish architecture. Musical instruments add their own special color to enhance the beauty of a song.

LANGUAGE POINTS

-line 2 “Cantar” here is a noun meaning “song”.

-lines 7-8: these lines defy translation so I have paraphrased them. “Ensangrentada” (steeped in blood) brings to mind certain blood-stained events in Spanish history, e.g. the invasion of Napoleon (unforgettably painted by Goya) and the horrific carnage of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). Certain words in songs (as in poetry) are rich in association and allusion of this kind.

-line 13: suave. The meaning is “agradable a los sentidos’: agreeable to the senses.

-line 16-17. “Manola cantada in coplas preciosas”: This is apparently an allusion to the late 19th century and working class women of Madrid who dressed in a flamboyant zarzuela-type costume and had plenty of what is called today “attitude”. (Collins Dictionary).

-line 19-21. It is the custom for people to put flowers around the frames of paintings of the Madonna found in churches.

Version in English

Granada, I'm falling under your spell,
And if you could speak, what a fascinating tale you would tell.
Of an age the world has long forgotten.
Of an age that weaves a silent magic in Granada today.

The dawn in the sky greets the day with a sigh for Granada,
For she can remember the splendor that once was Granada.
It still can be found in the hills all around as I wander along.
Enteranced by the beauty before me,
Enteranced by a land full of sunshine and flowers and song.

And when day is done and the sun starts to set in Granada,
I envy the blush of the snow-clad Sierra Nevada.
For soon it will welcome the stars while a thousand guitars,
Play a soft habanera.
Then moonlit Granada will live again the glory of yesterday,
Romantic and gay.

A few of the lines (e.g. 5, 10) are trite, in my opinion, but overall this is an imaginative rendering of the song in English and manages to capture much of the spirit of the original Spanish.