

What is a Corrido?

The *corrido* is a musical form developed in Mexico during the 1800s and originally sung throughout the country. Although still popular in Mexico, over time it became known as “musica de la frontera” (border music) because it was especially popular along both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. This musical-poetic form continues to be popular wherever Mexicans and Mexican Americans live.

Language

The following elements characterize the language in *corridos*:

- *Corridos* are stories told in poetic form and sung to simple, basic music, much like English ballads.
- *Corridos* use common, everyday language.
- Although traditional *corridos* were always in Spanish, in recent years some have appeared in English as well, or have mixed the two languages.
- The audience, if addressed is always addressed politely.
- The tone can vary from sincere to satirical.

Structure

The stories that *corridos* tell, either fictional or historical, must be sung in the vernacular language of the people in order to be remembered (whether in English, Spanish or a mixture.) There is some variation in the poetic form, but most *corridos* have the following structure:

- 36 lines (6 stanzas of 6 lines each or 9 stanzas of 4 lines each)
- 7 to 10 syllables per line (sometimes the lines are repeated)
- Rhyme scheme that varies but most commonly uses an ABCBDB form in a six-line stanza or ABCB in a four-line stanza. (Sometimes couplets are used: AABB.)
- By tradition, the first stanza provides a setting for the story by either giving a specific date or naming a place.

Content

The traditional historical *corrido* told about actual events, especially the exploits of famous heroes or the tragic deaths of individuals fighting unjust authorities. When *corridos* became more commercially exploitable, some became mostly fictional. Today, a *corrido* can be about almost anything. These are some of the popular subjects:

- animals (such as racehorses or roosters)
- tragic love affairs
- criminal dealings, especially with contraband and smuggling
- migration and migrant labor
- social and political events
- the struggles of everyday life along the border
- assassinations or other violent deaths
- humorous occurrences or relationships
- catastrophes
- hometowns and regions
- miraculous events
- wars and revolutions
- local or national heroes