

LEGENDS · SPECIAL EDITION



RUBEN RADA

1943-2026

Stories behind his music

A LEGENDS special edition exploring the life, songs, personal stories and legacy of one of Uruguay's great musical innovators.

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The music lives on. Legends never fade.

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A life in music

01 A voice born in Montevideo

Omar Ruben Rada Silva was born on July 16, 1943. His childhood included financial hardship, football, radio and carnival. Before becoming a prominent name in Latin American music, he was a boy who sang tangos and found in his voice a way forward. Afro-Uruguayan culture was not an ornament in his music: it was his starting point.

02 The neighborhood as a school

Candombe was learned by listening and taking part. Rada acknowledged Pedro Ferreira as a master of phrasing, and his father as an influence on his drumming. Carnival and Los Hot Blowers broadened his education with humor, jazz and dance music. His singing could play with rhythm, imitate instruments and move from an intimate melody to an explosion of energy.

03 Mateo, El Kinto and a new blend

With Eduardo Mateo, Rada found a crucial creative partner. In El Kinto, Spanish-language songs, beat music and Afro-Uruguayan rhythms came together in a pioneering approach. Candombe beat emerged through the work of several musicians and experiences. Recordings later appeared on releases such as *Circa 1968*, issued in 1977: the release date must not be confused with the time the music was created.

04 From Tótem to the world of OPA

Tótem took that search toward rock and electric instruments. On the international scene, Rada's compositions reached Aírto Moreira and OPA, the band of Hugo and Osvaldo Fattoruso and Ringo Thielmann. His voice and percussion were essential to *Magic Time* (1977). The encounter with jazz fusion allowed candombe to travel without losing its rhythmic character.

05 Argentina, Mexico and the return

His solo career included a highly creative period in Argentina, bands admired by fellow musicians, and songs that became popular. In Mexico he worked as a percussionist and songwriter for other performers. He returned to Uruguay in 1995. *Black* and especially *Quién va a cantar* (2000) introduced him to new generations. He continued to explore jazz, tango, milonga and collaborations: mainstream success coexisted with his musical curiosity.

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The Ruben Rada you may not know

01 The footballer who found his voice

Rada wanted to play football. He recalled being fast and getting accepted into teams, but medical examinations found lasting effects from childhood tuberculosis and prevented that path. In interviews, he connected the interrupted dream with discovering his voice. It is a personal recollection: music was already part of his life, and no single magical moment explains his entire career.

02 When there were no drums, there were cans

In his conversation with Rolling Stone, Rada remembered children playing cans when they had no drums. That did not mean they could immediately join a candombe ensemble: they had to learn and respect the neighborhood's beat. His memory distinguished everyday play from becoming part of a drum group. Music began long before he owned an instrument.

03 Las manzanas: from rehearsal to song

Accounts of the Musicaciones place the episode in July 1969: Eduardo Mateo invited Rada to participate, and he returned a few hours later with Las manzanas. The song helped launch his first solo album, Rada, released that year. Later reissues took the name Las manzanas. An edition dated 1983 or 1998 does not mean the song originated then.

04 Mateo: a shared laboratory

Rada and Mateo helped shape a way of writing songs that brought candombe into a contemporary musical language. El Kinto was central to that search. Years later they reunited on Botija de mi país, an album made between 1985 and 1987. The Little Butterfly Records reissue describes that reunion: two figures of candombe beat worked together again after many years.

05 Dedos crossed borders as Fingers

Dedos, by Ruben Rada and Eduardo Useta, belonged to Tótem's repertoire. Aírto Moreira recorded it as Fingers (El Rada) on his 1973 album, with contributions from the Fattoruso brothers and Ringo Thielmann. Thus the composition circulated in the jazz world before many listeners knew Rada as a singer. It was not a different piece, but a new interpretation with another title and context.

06 Mexico: songs for other voices

In Mexico, songwriting for other performers was also a way to support his family. Rada said he worked with Tania Libertad and sought placements for his compositions. Two numbers that later became major hits in his own voice, Cha-cha, muchacha and Muriendo de plena, had originally been considered for other artists. Their path shows how a song's destiny can change before it finds its audience.

07 The connection with Alejandro Fernández

Alejandro Fernández's 1992 debut opens with Todo terminó. Sony Music credits published by Qobuz list Ruben Rada as composer and lyricist. Separately, Miscelánea Negra credits El mundo entero to Rada, with Fito Páez as guest. These recordings share the composition under different titles; the credits do not make Fernández or Páez co-writers. Dates on later digital compilations should not be treated as the work's origin.

08 The producer who asked for room

For Quién va a cantar, Rada approached Cachorro López with a specific aim: to reach a wider audience and remain in Uruguay with his family. As he told El País, the producer asked for the songs and wanted to work without his constant additions in the studio. It was a production decision to foreground direct melodies. That simplicity brought his music to listeners unfamiliar with El Kinto or Tótem.

09 Mi País began as a commission

In 1999, a campaign by the newspaper El País sought to honor Uruguayans living abroad. Rada received a concept and references to local customs, but the song was his. Advertising creative Mario Taglioretti recalled receiving the lyrics by fax and later hearing Rada sing them over the phone. Included on *Quién va a cantar* in 2000, *Mi País* acquired an emotional life far beyond the campaign.

10 A small movie theater for Gardel

Rada told *La Nación* that he and other musicians would gather to watch Carlos Gardel films. They rented equipment, arranged armchairs and shared a fascination for his voice. He connected those gatherings with *Tengo un candombe para Gardel*, a song he recalled writing very quickly because it told of his own experiences. Tango and drums were intertwined in his everyday life before becoming an album track.

11 A name traveling in the credits

Rada's international reach also grew away from the spotlight. People listening to Aírto's *Fingers* or OPA albums might encounter his compositions before recognizing his voice. Brecha describes this circulation: interest in the songs sometimes came before familiarity with the artist. His career reveals the composer and percussionist behind the popular singer.

12 Collaborations beyond genre boundaries

Loco de amor, recorded with Ketama for Black, built a bridge to another musical world. Fito Páez appears on El mundo entero and later sang with Rada again on 11 y 6. In a 2022 interview, Rada discussed new versions and musical encounters for Candombe con la ayudita de mis amigos. Collaboration was a way to keep listening, transforming songs and connecting with younger generations.

13 Joy was a musical idea too

Rada explained Muriendo de plena as a celebration of a life lived. In an El País interview he linked that outlook with his experience in Mexico and remembrance of the dead on November 2. Humor and dance did not erase the deeper theme: they offered a way to remember with affection. This coexistence of joy, memory and music is central to the tribute.

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The songs and their stories

Songs from the tribute. Their order is not final. Dates and versions refer to musical history, not concert dates.

01 Mi País

1999 campaign · Quién va a cantar, 2000 · Ruben Rada

A song about belonging, first created for Uruguayans living far from home. Its journey from an advertising campaign into the popular repertoire explains why so many listeners feel it belongs to them.

02 Quién va a cantar

Quién va a cantar · 2000 · Ruben Rada

The album's title song combines accessibility with a question about the place of poetry, imagination and joy. Its wide appeal did not erase that human concern.

03 Botija de mi país

Rada and Mateo · album released in 1987 · Ruben Rada

The title track of the recorded reunion with Eduardo Mateo. Credits identify Rada as writer and composer; sharing an album and performance does not necessarily mean sharing authorship of each track.

04 Ayer te vi

Radeces, 1975 · new version on La Rada, 1981 · Ruben Rada

A classic Rada recorded again at different stages. The La Rada interpretation was not its first appearance: it was already on Radeces. That continuity shows how a composition evolves with its performer.

05 Tengo un candombe para Gardel

La yapla mata · 1985 · Ruben Rada

An affectionate memory where tango meets the drums. Rada connected the song to gatherings with friends to watch Gardel films. It also appears in catalogs under the shortened title Candombe para Gardel.

06 Dedos

Tótem · Airtó version on Fingers, 1973 · Ruben Rada · Eduardo Useta

Its journey from Tótem to Airtó Moreira's Fingers (El Rada) reveals the international reach of that fusion. The 1973 date belongs to Airtó's version, not to the birth of the composition.

07 Cha-cha, muchacha

Quién va a cantar · 2000 · Ruben Rada

The single that introduced his voice to a new audience. The song belongs to the Cachorro López-produced era, with direct melodies and arrangements designed for broad appeal.

08 Terapia de murga

Terapia de murga, 1991 · revisited on Alegre caballero, 2002 · Ruben Rada

The title evokes the world of carnival and murga. Rada returned to the song on Alegre caballero: the 2000s recording is not its origin.

09 Georgia on My Mind

1930 composition · jazz standard in Rada's repertoire · Hoagy Carmichael · Stuart Gorrell

Rada included the song among pieces he wanted to sing when looking back on his career, linking it to his admiration for Ray Charles. Charles popularized the work, but Carmichael and Gorrell wrote it.

10 Dos gardenias

Tango, milonga y candombe · 2014 period; live edition, 2016 · Isolina Carrillo

The Cuban bolero finds a different landscape in Rada's voice. Its inclusion reminds us that this tribute celebrates the interpreter as well as the songwriter: not every song he made his own was written by him.

11 Milonga para una niña / Los ejes de mi carreta

A meeting of songs · Tango, milonga y candombe · Alfredo Zitarrosa / Atahualpa Yupanqui · Romildo Risso

Two separate works meet in Rada's interpretation. Milonga para una niña is by Zitarrosa; Los ejes de mi carreta combines Yupanqui's music with Risso's words. This is a meeting of traditions, not a single Rada composition.

12 Muriendo de plena

Quién va a cantar · 2000 · Ruben Rada

A danceable song turning a reflection on death into a celebration. Its place on an album released in 2000 is distinct from later single-release dates and reissues.

13 Blumana

Festive repertoire

Also known for the refrain Tocá che Negro Rada: a reference point in his festive repertoire.

14 Loco de amor

Black

A collaboration with Ketama from the Black era, before Quién va a cantar.

15 El mundo entero

Miscelánea Negra

Rada is credited as composer and Fito Páez appears as a guest on Miscelánea Negra.

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Listen to his music

Ruben Rada's music remains available in recordings from different periods. You can explore his albums and find the LEGENDS tribute playlist on Spotify. Once the playlist is published, a direct link will be added to the digital edition.

[Spotify ↗](#)

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Discover LEGENDS

LEGENDS is Adrian Antoine's project celebrating the stories, music and legacy of great artists through concerts, audiovisual productions, books and special editions.

This Ruben Rada edition accompanies the live tribute and offers a way to explore his work beyond the stage.

Discover the LEGENDS book

In 46 chapters, LEGENDS shares real stories behind artists who shaped generations: creative decisions, challenges, pivotal moments and the human lives behind familiar music. It is a book for music lovers, not only musicians. Read the stories, discover what drove these artists and explore their legacy. Available on Amazon.

[Amazon](#) ↗

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A legacy that keeps playing

Rada left a way of understanding music: listening to the neighborhood and the world at the same time. His songs bring together roots, imagination, virtuosity and warmth. He died on August 26, 2026; his work lives on in recordings, in the musicians who learned from him and in everyone who sings his songs again.

The music lives on. Legends never fade.

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