



Musical and Historical Background of the song La Llorona

The song “La Llorona” is one of Mexico’s most traditional and best-known songs. The song is often played during the festivities of Día de los Muertos (Day of the Death) and has recently gained more worldwide recognition because of the Disney movie *Coco*. Prior to that, the singer Chavela Vargas was who elevated and immortalized the song. The song originated in the city of Tehuantepec, in the state of Oaxaca. The original songwriter is unknown and so is its date of origin. However, the scholar Flora Botton-Burla gathered 121 copies of the song, and the oldest copy dates back to 1932, just 10 years after the Mexican Revolution.

The song “La Llorona” is often assumed to be about the folktale of *La Llorona*, or the weeping women, tells the story of a woman who after being abandoned by her husband, murdered her children in a fit of blind rage and her mourning soul was cursed to wander the earth for the rest of eternity. However, the song “La Llorona” is said to be inspired by the story of a young couple during the Mexican Revolution.

According to the story, a young man from Tehuantepec went to a party in a neighboring city, and on his way back home he saw a girl coming out of a temple. The girl wore a huipil (a traditional layered dress) and after seeing her, he fell in love with her. For a long time, he put a lot of effort to gain her parents' approval, and once he did, the couple got married and started

trying to form a family together. Sadly, between 1911 and 1912 the Mexican Revolution reached the state of Oaxaca, and the now-husband had to leave and join the war. Once he found out he had to leave soon, he told his wife, "I remember that day we went to the river and the lily field. Without you the clouds of my sky mean nothing, the sun cannot compete with your smile...The war is calling me now. I promise to come back to you and to our future family, I will never stop loving you, not in this life and not even in death."

Tragically, the day he had to say goodbye and leave came, and his wife sobbed at the thought of not seeing him again. He looked at her tear-stained face and held her hands as well as wiped the tears off her face when they began to fall. He tried to make light of the cruel circumstances by making fun of her and calling her "Llorona" which means crybaby. The time came for him to go, and his wife watched him leave. With each step he took, her heart sobbed a little more.

One day a friend of the couple came back from the war, but her husband did not come back with him. He had been struck by the bullets, and his injuries were far too grave. Her husband's friend told her that while he took his last breath, he asked his friend to tell her that he would always love her and that he hoped she could forgive him for breaking his promise. The friend then handed the now widow a letter her husband wrote for her. The letter reads the following:

You were walking out of the temple one day, Llorona when I saw you pass,

You wore such a beautiful huipil Llorona that I thought you were the Virgin.

In the sky the sun is born Llorona, in the ocean the moon is born, and, in my heart, my love is born for you Llorona.

Ay my Llorona, you are my Xhunca (dear),

They could ask me to stop loving you Llorona,

But I could never.

I don't only sing when my heart is joyful Llorona,

I also sing when my heart is sorrowful my Llorona.

Don't cry my dear,

I will be waiting for you over the horizon every run rise.

The story behind the song "La Llorona" became very popular in the state of Oaxaca and the contents of the letter became the lyrics of the song. The song rapidly spread throughout Mexico because many people were losing their loved ones because of the war and the song became a way to remember their loved ones. The song "La Llorona" is commonly played at Día de los Muertos because it gives people hope that even though their loved ones have passed, they are waiting for them over the horizon, and they might meet again someday.

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