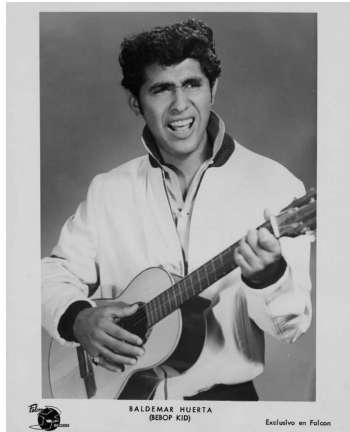




Freddy Fender

June 4, 1937 - October 14, 2006

Corpus Christi, Texas

Freddy Fender, born Baldemar Garza Huerta, the Texas singer whose bilingual hits carried Tejano and country to the same radio dial, died of lung cancer at his home in Corpus Christi, Texas, on October 14, 2006. He was sixty-nine.

He was born in San Benito, in the Rio Grande Valley, on June 4, 1937, and grew up speaking Spanish at home and English at school. He taught himself guitar, joined the Marines as a teenager, and after his discharge began recording as El Bebop Kid and then as Freddy Fender, a stage name he said he took from the headstock of his guitar. Early rock-and-roll singles in Spanish and English got him regional attention and, in 1960, a prison sentence at Angola for marijuana possession that halted his career for several years.

He rebuilt quietly, playing lounges and dance halls across South Texas. In 1975 producer Huey P. Meaux cut "Before the Next Teardrop Falls" with him; the song went to number one on both the country and pop charts, and the follow-up "Wasted Days and Wasted Nights," a remake of his own 1959 side, did nearly as well. He became one of the first Mexican-American artists to score sustained mainstream country success, singing verses in Spanish without apology on national television.

In the 1990s he joined Doug Sahm, Flaco Jimenez and Augie Meyers in the Texas Tornados, whose Tex-Mex rock won a Grammy, and he later recorded with the genre-blending group Los Super Seven. Diabetes and hepatitis C slowed him; a kidney transplant in 2002 and a liver transplant in 2004 bought him time he used to keep singing. He was buried in San Benito. The cry in his tenor - half honky-tonk, half bolero - remains one of Texas music's signature sounds.

Services

Died in Corpus Christi, TX, October 14, 2006, aged 69. Portrait: Falcon Records publicity photograph (public domain), hosted by Notice Nearby.

NN-OBIT-2026-H283

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