

Germaine Franco

Born July 10

Mexican-American Film Composer, Arranger, Producer, and Percussionist
Modern



- Germaine grew up in El Paso, on the southwestern border of Texas. She was surrounded by the sounds of *mariachi* and *jarocho* music, as well as jazz, R&B, pop, and rock bands of the 1970s.
- At age 10, she began taking piano and percussion lessons.
- During her preteen and teen years, she spent hours every day immersed in music. She played in school ensembles (marching band, concert band, orchestra) and the El Paso Youth Symphony. She was often the only girl in the percussion section.
- Germaine graduated from high school at age 16, then received undergraduate and graduate degrees in percussion performance at Rice University. During college, she worked in the pit orchestra at a local theater and played in a Latin jazz band.
- After college, Franco became a professional orchestra player in Europe. She played in the Spoleto Festival Orchestra in Italy and was the only female percussionist in Berlin's World Orchestra.
- In 1988, Franco moved to Los Angeles to study with the Cuban percussionist Luis Conte. Germaine played in groups across the city, worked at various theaters, and began to score some independent films.
- She also became an assistant to film composer John Powell, helping him score and orchestrate 35 movies.
- In 2015 she began working independently, starting with the hip-hop/electronica score for the movie *Dope*. More movies followed, including the action comedy *Tag*, the fantasy *Little*, and the adventure *Dora and the Lost City of Gold*.
- Germaine continued her work in film with the Oscar-winning Pixar movie *Coco*. She co-orchestrated the score and co-wrote and produced five original songs, including "Un Poco Loco," "The World Es Mi Familia," and "Proud Corazón." Her work on the music, including traveling several times to Mexico to record local musicians, gave the score an authentic Mexican sound.
- Her work on *Coco* earned her an Annie Award for Outstanding Achievement for Music in an Animated Feature—she was the first Latina to receive this award.
- In 2016, Germaine became the first Latina and the first woman of color to be invited to join the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences music branch.
- Germaine received the Shirley Walker Award from the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) in 2018. This award honors those whose achievements have contributed to the diversity of film and television music.
- Also, in 2018, Univision named Franco one of the Top 15 Latinas changing the world.
- Lin-Manuel Miranda recruited Franco to score the movie *Encanto*, making her the first woman to score a Disney animated feature. The following year she became the first Latina to be nominated for an Oscar for Best Original Score. Her work also earned her a GRAMMY® Award for Best Score Soundtrack for Visual Media.
- Beyond the movies, Franco composed and produced the score for the Universal Studios Beijing Resort immersive media attraction *Kung Fu Panda: Land of Awesomeness*.
- Other highlights of her career include scoring the movie *Curious George: Royal Monkey* and co-writing and producing the theme song for the Nickelodeon show *The Casagrandes*.
- Franco is committed to supporting young musicians in Los Angeles. She is on the Board of Advisors for the Neighborhood Music School, which works to change lives through music education in East LA.

"I used to feel like I [have] to sound like everybody else. But that's not what people want. They actually want an original voice. I embrace my Latinidad. I embrace who I am, and if people want to work with me, that's great."

— Germaine Franco



Connections: Film Music Vocabulary

Film music plays a vital role in setting the mood and atmosphere of a movie. It can make a scene feel joyful, tense, or emotional and can help transport viewers to an entirely different world. Film music tries to:

- establish atmosphere, time, and place
- move the action forward
- describe the characters
- accompany scene changes
- add to the dramatic impact
- provide continuity across edits

Here are some terms and concepts used in the creation of a film's score and soundtrack:

Score: all of the original music written specifically for the movie.

Spotting Session: a meeting between the director, composer, and other key members of the film crew to discuss where music should be used in the film

Cue: An individual piece of music used in a specific scene. The master list of all the music in a movie is called a "cue sheet," so each item is a cue.

Theme: a recurring melody representing a character, setting, or idea in the film.

Source Music: music that is part of the film's world and can be heard by the characters in the scene. For example, in a scene where the main character is listening to the radio, the song they hear would be source music.



Listening Lab

"Antonio's Room" from *Encanto*

Franco's inspiration for this cue was the sound of *cantadoras*—groups of Afro-Colombian women who sing together while performing daily chores and activities. It was recorded by a choir of 12 singers in Columbia and 22 in Los Angeles.

"Un Poco Loco" from *Coco*

This song was co-written by Germaine Franco and Adrian Molina in the Mexican style of *son jarocho*. *Son jarocho* is a mix of indigenous, African, and Spanish musical elements. The characters Miguel and Hector perform the song on stage in the Land of the Dead. Listen for the instrument called the jawbone played when the skeleton is dancing.

"Camino Real de Parapata" from *Dora and the Lost City of Gold*

In this cue, listen for the whispering and singing in *Quechua*, an indigenous language family spoken by the Quechua people in the Peruvian Andes. Franco wrote poems in Spanish, which were then translated into the Quechua language and sung in crucial moments of the movie.

"To all the female composers out there, to all of the people of color ... we're all one community. Let's not be divided by the titles. Let's just create music together, create love and hope and joy because we know the line between our life and the next chapter is very fine. So instead of building the barriers, let's just break them down. I like to do that through music, and I hope you'll join me."

— Germaine Franco

(from her acceptance speech of the 2018 ASCAP Shirley Walker Award)



Review

At what age did Germaine begin taking percussion lessons?

- 8
- 10
- 16
- 26

After college, Franco became the only female percussionist in which orchestra?

- Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra
- Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences
- Los Angeles Philharmonic
- Berlin World Orchestra

After moving to Los Angeles, Germaine became an assistant to which film composer?

- Luis Conte
- Lin-Manuel Miranda
- John Powell
- Shirley Walker

Franco became the first Latina to receive the Annie Award for Outstanding Achievement for Music in an Animated Feature for her work on the movie:

- Coco*
- Encanto*
- Tag*
- Dora and the Lost City of Gold*

True or False: No Latina has yet been nominated for an Oscar for Best Original Score.

Prove it!: Provide a fact that supports your answer of true or false.

Germaine was the first woman to score a Disney animated feature—name the movie.

Listen to a piece of music by Germaine Franco.

- List the title and describe the work.
- What grabs your attention the most?
- What instruments do you hear?
- How does the music make you feel?

Reflect

How has Franco's rich Mexican-American heritage been a benefit to her as a composer?

What advice would Germaine give young people interested in pursuing a career in music composition?

Writing Prompt

Despite facing gender barriers in the male-dominated music industry, how has Germaine Franco persevered and become a successful composer? What challenges do you think she faced in building her career? Write about a time when you overcame a challenge or obstacle and how you felt when you accomplished your goal.
