



Martin, Ricky (b. 1971)

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Singer Ricky Martin has had an extremely successful career. He has sold over fifty million albums and won numerous awards. His good looks and his energetic and sensuous stage performances have made him a favorite of young female fans and also earned him a considerable gay male following. Speculation that Martin himself might be gay was rife for years, but he consistently avoided answering questions on the topic until 2010, when he came out publicly via a Twitter announcement.

Born Enrique José Martín Morales on December 24, 1971 in San Juan, Puerto Rico, he is the son of Enrique Martín and Nereida Morales.

His parents divorced when he was two years old, after which he lived primarily with his mother and two older stepbrothers from her previous marriage, but he also maintained a strong relationship with his father during his youth, and he claims that he had a happy childhood.

If Martin's childhood was happy, it was also busy. By the age of six, the winsome boy had begun appearing in television commercials, and at twelve he joined the boy band Menudo. In the case of this group, the word boy is to be taken literally; as members reached their late teens, they were replaced by younger singers, so even as the years passed the members of the band remained boys.

Martin quickly developed a stage presence that engaged fans, especially adolescent girls, who packed concert venues as Menudo toured all over the world. Eventually Martin tired of the grind of the travel schedule, and so he left Menudo in 1989 after five years with the band.

His frequent absences from Puerto Rico and the difficulty of dividing his time at home between his parents put a strain on his relationship with his father. The two were estranged for many years but achieved a reconciliation in the mid 1990s.

After the frenzied existence of globe-trotting and performing before huge crowds of shrieking fans, Martin spent a year in New York City, enjoying a respite out of the spotlight as he contemplated his future.

Martin next moved to Mexico City, where he worked in musical theater and appeared on a soap opera. He also signed his first recording contract as a solo artist.

His Spanish-language debut album, *Ricky Martin* (1991), was an enormous success in Latin America, as was his second, *Me Amarás* (1993). Martin resumed touring, this time as a headliner in his own right.

While Martin was recording his third album, *A Medio Vivir* (1995), in Los Angeles, his concert work caught the attention of the producers of the popular American soap opera *General Hospital*, who were eager to have him join the cast. Martin appeared as singing barman Miguel Morez in the 1994-95 season of the show.

Martin did a star turn on Broadway in a revival of *Les Misérables* (book by Claude-Michel Schönberg and



Ricky Martin at the National Puerto Rican Day Parade in New York City in 2007. Photograph by Brian Lin. Image appears under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic license.

Alain Boublil, music by Schönberg, lyrics by Herbert Kretzmer) in 1996, and the following year he voiced the title character in the Latin-American version of Ron Clements and John Musker's animated Disney film *Hercules*.

Martin's single "La Copa de la Vida" was chosen by the World Cup Federation as the official song of the prestigious soccer tournament in 1998. Since the album on which it was included, *Vuelve* (1998), was nominated for a Grammy Award for Best Latin Pop Album, he was invited to sing it at the award ceremonies in February 1999.

Martin's sizzling performance stopped the show. He came away from the evening with a Grammy Award, sudden new legions of women and gay men as fans, and a reputation as an "overnight success" even though he had been in the business for fifteen years.

Martin responded to his newfound celebrity in the United States by putting out his first English-language album, which was, like his debut album, entitled simply *Ricky Martin* (1999) and includes the phenomenally successful song "Livin' La Vida Loca." The album proved to be one of the most popular of the year, and sales of it have exceeded twenty million copies.

Martin had been linked romantically with a series of beautiful women, including the former Miss Venezuela and Miss Universe Alicia Machado, Mexican singer and actress Sasha Sökol, Venezuelan rock singer Alejandra Guzmán, Brazilian actress Adriana Biega, and Mexican television host Rebecca de Alba.

There was, nevertheless, considerable speculation that Martin was gay, but when the question was raised in interviews, he routinely ducked it.

In a famous interview in 2000, Barbara Walters pressed Martin on his sexuality, telling him "You could say, as many artists have, 'Yes, I am gay,' or you could say, 'No, I'm not,' or you could leave it, as you are, ambiguous." Later, in 2010, she would say that she regretted pressuring him, rather grandiosely (and inaccurately) suggesting that the question destroyed his career because when he refused to answer it directly everyone assumed that he was gay.

"I don't think I should have to tell anyone if I am gay or not, or who I've slept with or not," he stated to Sally Morgan of *The Mirror* in 2000. "Sure, I have a huge gay following, but when I'm singing, I don't have girls or boys . . . in mind--my music is for everyone."

Rocco Lanzilotta, a marketing director at Martin's label, Columbia Records, echoed this sentiment, telling John Griffiths of *The Advocate*, "With Ricky, the strategy is all-inclusive. . . . Ricky transcends all demographics--that's what's exciting about him."

It was indisputable that Martin had many gay fans, but they did not comprise the majority of the people buying his records. An important component of his fan base was the female teen audience, entranced by a handsome young man, clad in leather pants, dazzling them with sensational and sensuous performances on stage while (apparently) singing about their dreams of heterosexual love.

If the singing was better than average, if not exceptional, and the allure of the performer sufficient, the sustenance of the fantasies of the fans could be enough, but the revelation that the artist was gay posed a serious risk.

"There are no examples of an openly gay heartthrob appealing to teenage girls, and no one wants to test that. Hormones sell these records," Darin Soler, a marketer in the recording industry, told Griffiths.

In addition, many of Martin's young female fans were Latinas, and engrained homophobia in their shared culture made acceptance of a gay artist even more problematic.

Tellingly, while Martin had shown his esteem for the openly gay composer Renato Russo, who had died of AIDS, by including a tribute to him on his album *Vuelve*, he deliberately avoided identifying himself as a member of the gay community. Friends and associates who were in his confidence warned him that such a move could destroy his career.

Martin released a second English-language album, *Sound Loaded*, in 2000. Sales reached four million copies, a success by any standard but not the runaway hit that its predecessor had been.

For his next album, Martin chose to return to his Latino roots--whereupon, he told Lola Ogunnaike of the *New York Times*, "My record label went berserk," fearing that they would lose the lucrative North American market. Still, Martin insisted, putting out *Almas del Silencio* (2003), which Ogunnaike described as "a collection of songs that are far more substantial and introspective than the sugary, good-time pop Mr. Martin is known for."

Martin continued to tour and release albums of his performances, but he next made headlines when, in August 2008, he became the father of twin boys born via surrogacy.

It is to fatherhood that Martin attributed his decision to come out as a gay man in 2010, when he announced on the Internet, "I am proud to say that I am a fortunate homosexual man." He went on to say that he was working on a memoir and felt the need to be candid because "to keep living as I did up until today would be to indirectly diminish the glow that my kids were born with. Enough is enough."

The revelation took almost no one by surprise. Although Martin had hesitated to make it because of the repeated warnings about damage to his career, in the event both fans and fellow musicians rallied around him and expressed their support.

It may well be that Martin will emerge as a significant voice on behalf of gay rights in the Latino communities. The support that he received upon his public coming out seems to have emboldened him to speak out on other public issues. For example, soon after publicly coming out, in response to an bill passed in Arizona that authorizes police to stop and question anyone they suspect is in the country illegally, Martin issued the following statement on his Twitter page: "Equality is understanding that we all come from the same place. Racial profiling should never be tolerated in the U.S., or anywhere in the world."

In 2000 Martin created the Ricky Martin Foundation for the welfare of children to promote education, ensure health care, and eliminate human trafficking. He appeared before the International Relations Committee of the United States House of Representatives in 2006 to urge ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In conjunction with Microsoft, the Foundation established the Navega Protegido project to educate parents, teachers, and children about Internet hazards such as predators and identity theft.

Martin's work on behalf of children has taken him to venues around the world and earned him honors from various groups, including the U.S. Department of State, which designated him an International Hero in its 2005 Trafficking in Persons Report in recognition of his humanitarian efforts.

In a VH-1 "Behind the Music" special in August 2011, Martin discussed both his relationship with his partner of four years Puerto Rican financier Carlos Gonzalez and his commitment to the struggle for equal rights.

In the special, he describes Gonzalez as follows: "My boyfriend is very sexy, very smart, very compassionate. But most importantly, he loves my children. . . . It is very beautiful. Super cool. I'm very

happy.

The Spanish government announced on November 4, 2011 that it had extended Spanish citizenship to Martin. The government spokesman announced that Martin had been granted a "letter of naturalization" issued under special circumstances because of his "personal and professional associations with Spain."

Upon this announcement, speculation erupted that Martin sought Spanish citizenship so that he and Gonzalez can wed in Spain, which in 2005 became the third country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage.

Speculation is that Martin and Gonzalez, who are jointly rearing the twins, want to marry in Spain in order to secure the greater legal protections afforded non-traditional families in countries that recognize same-sex marriage.

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