

For thousands of years, human beings have used the night sky to navigate, keep track of the seasons, and inspire myths and legends. The tradition of naming stars is as old as history itself. Before modern times, however, humans could only name the stars that were visible in the night sky--a tiny fraction of the number of stars we can see today with powerful telescopes. Some stars have beautiful and evocative names, while some stars are designated by unimaginative-sounding groups of numbers and letters. So how do stars get their names?

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Today, most stars are not given proper names. However, a few stars have kept names given many years ago. Here are a few ways a star may have come by its name.

**Tradition.** Some stars stand out from the rest. These "stars among stars" have been singled out with traditional names for centuries. Polaris, for example, is the one star that seems to occupy a fixed position in the heavens. People have been using it as a navigation aid for millennia, and it has had many different names in various cultures. In addition to Polaris, Western culture occasionally refers to it as the North Star or the Pole Star.

**Ancient star catalogues.** Some star names have been preserved in the works of ancient astronomers. Perhaps the earliest star catalogue we know of was written by Gan De, a Chinese astronomer who lived in the 4th century BC. The Western world's first star catalogue was written by Timocharis, an astronomer from Alexandria, about a hundred years later.

Most of the ancient star names still in use today, however, can be traced to the 2nd century AD. Ptolemy, a Greek mathematician and astronomer who lived in Egypt almost two thousand years ago, wrote a star catalogue in *The Almagest*, a mathematical and astronomical document outlining star and planetary motions and mechanics.

Ptolemy's catalogue contains over a thousand stars. Most of these are identified first by their position within a certain constellation; second by their longitude and latitude; and third by their magnitude, or brightness. He did give a few stars special names, most of which are in common use today. These include Arcturus, Sirius, Regulus, Capella, and Spica.

**Medieval Arabic translations.** In the Middle Ages, Ptolemy's *Almagest* was adopted by Arabic astronomers, who translated many of the original Greek names into Arabic. Most of the Arabic names were derived from Ptolemy's descriptions of the locations of the stars within their constellations. For example, Arab astronomers named a star within the left foot of Orion the Hunter "Rigel," which is Arabic for "foot." Other stars whose names derive from Arabic include Deneb, Betelgeuse, Vega, and Altair.

**Prominent astronomers.** A very few stars are named after the astronomers who studied them. Barnard's Star, for example, is a red dwarf named after E. E. Barnard, who discovered it in 1916. Van Maanen's Star is the second white dwarf star ever found, and it was named after Adrian Van Maanen, its discoverer. Bessel's Star is named after George Friedrich Bessel, who measured its distance from Earth in 1838.

**Powerful people.** Even more rarely, a star can be named after an important figure in history. For example, the brightest star in the Canes Venatici (Hunting Dogs) constellation is named Cor Caroli, meaning "Heart of Charles." Historians are not sure whether it was named in honor of King Charles I or King Charles II of England.

**Bayer designations.** During the early 17th century, German astronomer Johann Bayer traveled by ship to different hemispheres in search of stars to observe. Bayer compiled a star catalogue in which he named stars by designating first a lower-case Greek letter, such as alpha or gamma, and then the Latin name of the constellation each star could be found in. The Latin constellation names were usually given in the possessive form, to indicate the star "belonged" to that constellation. Many of these names are still in use today, including Alpha Centauri, Alpha Canis Majoris, and Beta Persei.

Modern sky catalogues. The situation gets a bit complicated when it comes to the way stars are named today. Astronomers are performing new sky surveys and compiling star catalogues to record new discoveries every day. Some of these catalogues are extremely large--the Guide Star Catalogue II, for example, contains over 998 million stars. There are too many stars to give each one a unique proper name. As a result, most naming conventions depend on a series of numbers indicating the star's location, brightness, and other factors. An example is SDSSp J153259.96-003944.1. The lettered section (SDSSp) indicates that the designation is from the Sloan Digital Sky Survey of preliminary objects, and the numbers give the star's location in the sky.

The stars we see when we look into the sky on a clear night are only a tiny fraction of the number we can see through a powerful telescope--and those in turn represent only a tiny amount of the total number of stars too far away to see. With the billions of stars in existence, it's not practical to give each one a special name of its own. That makes the few stars with proper names almost unique in the universe.

The Fania All Stars made Salsa popular around the world in the 1970's. They could fill stadiums and arenas everywhere they went. They played a big part in the huge success Salsa enjoyed during the 1970's. Below I'll share with you my favorite Fania All Stars recordings, which I recommend you add to your music collection.

Fania All Stars Early Live Recordings:

The Fania All Stars early "live" recordings were some of their best work, with the exception of their forgettable very 1st recording, "Live at the Red Garter" (1968). Some people loved the uncontrolled jams that were recorded in the album, which includes probably the only appearances in the Fania All Stars by Tito Puente, and Eddie Palmieri. Still, no lasting hits came out of it.

The "Live at the Cheetah" recording (1971) was a totally different thing. Fania applied what they learned in the 1st recording, and came with a full line-up of stars, ready to rock the Cheetah. This, in my opinion, was their best work ever. The music sounded as powerful as it ever did, a showcase of what salsa should sound like. The arrangements, most made by Bobby Valentin, were superb. The musicians were truly an All Star; the percussion had Ray Barretto (congas), Orestes Vilato (timbal), and Roberto Roena (bongo). For the subsequent albums Orestes was substituted by Nicky Marrero, an exceptional musician as well. But Vilato played his heart out in this recording, and you can hear his timbal highlight almost every song. You could tell he and Ray Barretto were band mates, as they play each other perfectly in solos and improvised cuts during a song. Barretto didn't hold back either, and made the conga be felt in every opportunity. And as far as Roberto Roena in the bongo and "campana" (cow bell), I have just two words; "Ponte Duro"; amazing!

The rhythm section had Larry Harlow on piano (Richie Ray played it in "Ahora Vengo Yo" to accompany his singer Bobby Cruz), Bobby Valentin on bass, and Yomo Toro on the Puerto Rican "cuatro" guitar. In the wind section you had Barretto's Roberto Rodriguez, Dominican Hector "Bomberito" Zarzuela, and Larry Spencer in trumpets, and Barry Rogers, Reynaldo Jorge, and Willie Colon on trombone! You couldn't assemble a better wind section in Latin music (perhaps with the exception of adding Panamanian trumpet player Victor Paz, who participated in the 1st recording, and would have been welcomed back), and it shows. They sound so harmonic and powerful, you would think they've been playing together since 2nd grade.

The singers were the best of what was out there, before all the band-singer splits started to occur. Pete "El Conde" Rodriguez, Hector Lavoe, Ismael Miranda, Adalberto Santiago, Cheo Feliciano, Santos Colon, and Bobby Cruz. All excellent signers, but in my opinion, Pete "El Conde" and Cheo Feliciano were the highlights, with their performance on songs "Macho Cimarron" and "Anacaona" respectively, as well as their "soneos" on the all-singers songs like "Estrellas de Fania" and "Quitate Tu".

I can't think of a single off song in this recording. All songs are a joy to listen, even the Intro and Closing themes, and all made radio hits, even when they were much longer than what was the normal 3-4 minute playing time in

radio. The public in the Cheetah got very much into it, dancing and doing "la clave" in a couple of songs.

I think it's evident this is my personal favorite Fania All Stars recording, and no true salsa-lover should be without this 2-CD set (or LP's, as the case may be) in their collection. In my opinion, this recording is one of Salsa music's standout classic hit recordings.

"Latin-Soul-Rock" (1974) followed the Cheetah recording. Talk about going from way high to way low. Here the Fania started showing its intent to crossover, and do more than "Salsa Dura". A good product of that was the version of "El Raton" with Cheo Feliciano singing his Joe Cuba Sextet hit, with Jorge "El Malo" Santana (Carlos Santana's brother) in the electric guitar. This was the song that sold most for this recording. Fania brought as guest, African saxophone player Manu Dibango, and had some fusion songs in there of some interest, but this was not what "salseros" were waiting for in the Fania All Stars' next recording.

The Fania All Stars made up the lost ground with the double album "Live at Yankee Stadium" (1976), which provided another "home run" after "striking out" with "Latin-Soul-Rock". The funny thing about this album was that most of it was not recorded at the Yankee Stadium, but at the Coliseo Roberto Clemente in San Juan. The Yankee Stadium concert was ill-planned, and resulted in an early melee which caused severe destruction to the stadium and forced the cancellation of the concert. Emusica, the firm which purchased the rights to the Fania collection a few years ago, recently released the original "live" recording of the San Juan concert of 1973. You can confirm in the original recording that some songs were "re-touched" in the recording studio, with some songs "re-touched" more than others. Hector Lavoe's "Mi Gente" was kept pretty much as it was originally recorded, where as Ismael Miranda's "Que Rico Suenan mi Tambor" had most of the "soneos" re-done, for good reason (the original "soneos" were very repetitive).

All in all, this Yankee Stadium recording is a good recording by the Fania All Stars. The end product had good songs with good arrangements. Richie Ray and Bobby Cruz start showing their religious devotion on "Hermandad Fania", while the addition of veterans Celia Cruz, Justo Betancourt and Eddie Palmieri's Ismael Quintana were welcome additions to the singers' star-line-up. That meant Cheo Feliciano didn't get much chance to sing on this recording. Good recording, but a lot more "scripted" than the Cheetah. The music still sounds powerful, but not electrifying. This recording doesn't have the magic of the Cheetah, and not all songs are as strong. You can hear the Cheetah double-albums back-to-back, and at the end, feel like starting all over again. When playing the Yankee Stadium double-albums back-to-back, you start to feel hints of boredom at some point. Much of the music just sounds the same. The Cheetah music had changes in pace or style (son montuno to guajira, to rumba, back to son), which made every song "fresh".

I still recommend buying this "Live at Yankee Stadium" double-album. It does have some great songs, with the outstanding "Mi Gente", where the public does "coro" to Hector Lavoe (with a good home theater or head phones, you feel like in the middle of the concert in this song) and the trombone solos of Barry Rogers and Willie Colon add the cherry in the top. Other notable songs are "Pueblo Latino" by Pete "El Conde", "Bemba Colora" by Celia Cruz (a bit too long for my taste), and I like Justo Betancourt's "Echate pa'lla". There is also the "descarga" "Congo Bongo" with Mongo Santamaria, and Ismael Quintana's "Mi Debilidad".

Fania All Stars - Studio Recordings:

The Fania All Stars then decided to do some studio recordings. Their first one, which is my 2nd favorite

Fania All Stars recording, is "Tribute to Tito Rodriguez" (1976). In this recording, Fania found the "original formula" again. This recording has a powerful sound, mixed well the rhythm of the songs, and brought back the full All-Star singers line-up, with then newcomer Ruben Blades filling in for Celia Cruz. The young Panamanian did superbly in his Fania All Stars debut, with "Los Muchachos de Belen" which has a very strong mambo, anchored by the trombone section of Barry Rogers, Reynaldo Jorge, and Willie Colon. Ruben's soneos are right on; he sings his heart out and aces the song. The rest of this superbly well recorded album is not to be dismissed. It opens with a

"bolero" medley of 3 of Tito Rodriguez's favorites; "Inolvidable", "Lo Mismo Que a Usted", and "Tiemblas", interpreted by Cheo Feliciano, Chivirico Davila, and Bobby Cruz respectively. Cheo Feliciano is a bolero master and delivers exceptionally in "Inolvidable"; Chivirico comes back after appearing at the Red Garter with Armando Manzanero's "Lo Mismo Que a Usted", and Bobby Cruz, another maestro of the bolero, shines in "Tiemblas". Ismael Miranda does a good interpretation of "El Agua de Belen", and I love Justo Bentancourt's superb interpretation of "Cara de Payaso", Hector Lavoe's fine-tuned voice in "Cuando, Cuando, Cuando", and Ismael Quintana's fresh interpretation of "Fue en Santiago". Then all singers come together to pay homage to Tito Rodriguez in "Vuela la Paloma".

"Tribute to Tito Rodriguez" is another recording that should not be missing in your collection. It has great songs, great performances, powerful Fania All Star sound, and a great recording job done at the studio for a clear quality sound.

"Havana Jam" (1979) was the Fania All Stars last recording of the '70's. This was a live concert in Cuba, in which the Fania All Stars shared the stage with other American artists like Billy Joel, Rita Coolidge, Kris Kristofferson, and with the participation of Cuba's Irakere and Orquesta Aragon, in what was classified as a "cultural exchange".

The Fania All Stars Crossover:

Starting in the late 1970's and throughout the 1980's, the Fania All Stars worked very hard at crossing over to Latin Jazz, Jazz, and even Rock in order to attract a wider audience. Most of these crossover recordings were forgettable. These recordings started in the late '70's with "Rhythm Machine" (1977) and "Spanish Fever" (1978). The album "Cross Over" (1979) was actually NOT a cross over recording, but rather the 1st pure "salsa" album since the Tito Rodriguez one. Why they called this one "Cross Over" beats me, but it is a decent recording, with Salvador Cuevas taking over bass duties for Bobby Valentin.

The 1980's were mostly devoted to cross over recordings, with some exceptions of "Lo Que Pide la Gente" which highlighted Hector Lavoe's "El Rey de la Puntualidad", where Hector made a self-mock of his infamous tardiness to gigs. One of my favorites albums from this cross over recordings, was "Rhythm Machine". Besides having Ruben Blades super-hit "Juan Pachanga", the other jazzy songs are pretty decent, anchored by the trumpet (and arrangements) of Puerto Rican maestro Luis "Perico" Ortiz. Perico is a natural for jazz, being jazz one of his musical loves, and it shows in this recording. Perico's arrangements mostly tend to have either elements of jazz or of "big band". His own band had a very powerful "big band" sound, with very jazzy arrangements.



The Fall of the Fania All Stars:

The 1980's and the cross over attempts weakened the Fania All Stars in particular and Salsa music in general. The cross over attempts were understandable, given the popularity and commercial success Rock and Disco were having during this period. Fania was trying to ride that wave of commercial success in any way it could. The strategy didn't work. Perhaps it would have made more sense to keep the original concept and evolve the sound (as with the Tito Rodriguez album).

The prestige of having participated with the Fania All Stars never died. To this date, musicians who played with the

Fania All Stars have that as a golden star in their resume. The Fania All Stars travelled all over the world, even making recordings in Africa (for the Mohammed Ali -George Foreman fight in Zaire) and also in Japan and Cuba. They visited Europe and South America frequently. They spread the gospel of Salsa, and people were receptive to it. Because of that, salsa is listened and danced to all over the world.

My Favorites (summary):

The good Fania All Stars recordings are in the early to mid 70's, as I mentioned above. If you like dancing or listening to real salsa, my best recommendation is "Live at the Cheetah" and "Tribute to Tito Rodriguez". You can't go wrong with these recordings, with the "Live at Yankee Stadium" in a close 3rd. If you come along some of the cross over albums, just make sure you reset your expectations before purchasing.

I also recommend two of the Fania All Star movies, as they show more than just the music. One is "Our Latin Thing", which opens with Barretto's theme "Cocinando", a nice "Latin Jazz" tune which became very popular at the time. The film highlights the concert at the Cheetah, but also shows life in the Barrio of New York, and the role salsa played in that neighborhood at during those years.

The other film I recommend is "Salsa". In this documentary, Gerardo Rivera narrates the history of Salsa, from the early influences of Latinos in the music scene of the United States, to the Fania All Stars and El Gran Combo. Good informative documentary, with not that much music ("Mi Gente" by the Fania All Stars, and "Julia" by El Gran Combo are the musical highlights).

The Fania All Stars were a game-changer for Salsa music, and perhaps Salsa music owes its durability to the solid [foundation](#) this group provided during the pivotal years of the early 1970's. This group wrote many golden pages in the history of Salsa.