

Embraced by Gen Z and Netflix, Julio Iglesias pines for love

NEW

The 'best-known Spaniard of the 20th century after Dali and Picasso' has been taken for granted by the world, his biographer says



Resplendent in white trousers in 2004, Julio Iglesias offered the world a window into Spanish love ballads

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[Isambard Wilkinson](#), Madrid

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Feted by presidents, befriended by a king and bedded by thousands of women, the singer Julio Iglesias may not appear to be in need of affection.

However, a new biography of the crooner, which has rocketed to third place in Spain's bestseller list, argues just that, saying that he has been taken for granted, his reputation blemished by cultural snobbery.

Ignacio Peyró, author of *El Espanol que enamoro al mundo* (The Spaniard who seduced the world), hopes the book will help to "look at Iglesias afresh and purge any cultural complex" about the singer.

- [What I've learnt: Julio Iglesias](#)

"For Spaniards he is a figure like the Queen who has accompanied us throughout our lives, mirroring our modern history, but he turned 80 last year and he won't be around forever," Peyró told The Times. "It is time to appreciate him before it's too late."

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Peyró — who has written acclaimed memoirs steeped in Spanish culture and identity — charts the rise of Iglesias, whose career as a goalkeeper for Real Madrid's youth team was thwarted by a car accident, to becoming the first Latino to achieve global fame.

"By the 1980s he had stopped a penalty from [football great Alfredo] Di Stéfano, had been a friend of Reagan and the Clintons ... had sung with Parton and Sinatra ... and even been named father of the year by an American family association," said Peyró. "He is the most well-known Spaniard of the 20th

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Netflix is filming a series about Iglesias's life

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Iglesias, right, was feted by King Juan Carlos of Spain, left

GIANNI FERRARI/COVER/GETTY IMAGES

His fame is without end. Augusto Pinochet, the Chilean dictator, used his music to torture political prisoners and in 1977, *El País* reported that his life was endangered by excessively enthusiastic female fans.

Netflix is filming a series about his life and he has a legion of Gen Z youths among his followers. “In the final furlong of his life, postmodern irony has also rewarded him with the supreme form of immortality: to convert him into a meme,” Peyró said.

The book’s thesis is that Iglesias is an unlikely star. “He is not that talented a singer and does not have extraordinary looks, [unlike say Tom Jones](#),” Peyró said. “Iglesias, like so many Spanish products, like *Don Quixote* or *paella*, should not work

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The book tells how aged 19, he was almost killed in a car accident that left him paralysed. It took him two years to learn to walk again. “My hands didn’t have much strength so I was given a guitar to help me regain movement in them,” he later said. “ I started making little simple harmonies, then simple songs. I learnt to play and became a singer: a bad singer! Now? I’m not so bad.”

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Iglesias's occasional modesty about his looks did not dampen the affections of the thousands of women rumoured to have had sex with him

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The singer with his first wife, Isabel Preysler whom he divorced in 1979, and their children Chabeli and Julio Jose

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The story of how a man wearing white trousers, a bronze tan and the look of “a guy absolutely satisfied to be in his own skin” conquered the world, echoes the rise of modern Spain.

His first public performance was in The Airport pub in 1965 in Cambridge, where his father, a doctor and official during the regime of Francisco Franco, had sent him to learn English. Soon he was playing in Benidorm where his father’s links to the regime helped him to overcome censors’ objections to his song, of which the title *La Vida Sigue Igual* (Life Goes on the Same), may have been deemed to be a comment on Franco’s long rule.

But it was Iglesias’s profile in Spain’s much-lauded transition to democracy after Franco’s death in 1975 that has seared him into the country’s consciousness. “Iglesias accompanied us when he sang on the first electoral night in Spain’s modern democracy [in 1981] and announced the first divorce, after he separated from Isabel Preysler [in 1978],” said Peyro.

In 1981 his *Begin the Beguine* was the first single not in English to sell over a million copies worldwide. He was a regular at the Royal Albert Hall. The Queen Mother asked him to sing *Begin*

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the concert. The peak of his fame took him to live in the US, where Newsweek called him “the most popular singer in the world”.

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From left: Iglesias, President Ronald Reagan and his wife Nancy, and the singers Andy Williams and Leslie Uggams

NBC/GETTY IMAGES

He formed a close friendship with King Juan Carlos. “As is custom in the Spanish aristocracy, Don Juan Carlos is a man notably uncomfortable faced with abstract intelligence ... both shared spiritual interests centred on wine and *titis* [chicks],” Peyró wrote in the biography.

Although an estimated 3,000 women “have passed through his life or at least his bed”, according to his former manager, and he is sexually what Peyró delicately calls a “pioneer of fusion”, he was “heartbroken” when his marriage to Preysler ended. Other family problems emerged when his son Enrique produced his first record without forewarning him, which he regarded as a treasonous act.

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But it was Julio’s father, also Julio, who was “the love of his life”. Julio Sr suffered on his son’s account when he spent 19 days in a makeshift jail as a kidnap victim of the Basque terrorist group ETA in 1982 before being freed by police. “I was kidnapped by idiots,” he said later.

Although a right-winger, Iglesias’s ability to win friends on both sides of the political divide makes him a figure who recalls a less polarised Spain. “He could campaign for [conservative former prime minister José Maria] Aznar without stopping publicly admiring Felipe [González Márquez, the former Socialist prime minister] ... and he was the only cultural expression of right-wing Madrid able to transcend all classes,” Peyró wrote.

And in spite of his vanity about his virility, on occasion he is given to fits of modesty. When a journalist asked him if he thought he was a sex symbol, he lifted his trouser bottoms to reveal thin shins and said: “When I look at myself in the morning, no.”

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