Perla Batalla is a GRAMMY-nominated vocalist and composer who spent several years as a backup singer for Leonard Cohen.

She has released seven solo albums and toured around the world.

Leonard Cohen was a Canadian singer-songwriter and poet who became famous for his lyrically sophisticated folk music in the late 1960s and early '70s.

Perla Batalla was born in Los Angeles to a Mexican father who was a singer and radio personality and an Argentinean mother who ran a record store called Discoteca Batalla. Perla grew up in the family record store, immersed in a wide range of musical influences.

Perla Batalla toured and recorded with Leonard Cohen from 1988 to 1994. She has also toured with artists including k.d. lang, Iggy Pop, and the Gipsy Kings.

She is the recipient of a UN Earth Charter Award for “extraordinary devotion to social and economic justice” and a Premio Fronterizo Award for “healing work in the world.”

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Perla Batalla's famous song is 1987's “Hallelujah,” which has inspired numerous covers, including a beloved one by Jeff Buckley, released in 1994.

LEGENDARY BACKUP SINGERS

Afrodiziak—Caron Wheeler, Claudia Fontaine, and Naomi Thompson were the go-to backup singers for pop acts throughout the '80s

Merry Clayton—sang with Neil Young, the Rolling Stones, and many more

Sheryl Crow—sang backup for Michael Jackson, Don Henley, Stevie Wonder, and others before becoming a solo star

Clydie King—sang with Bob Dylan, Ray Charles, the Rolling Stones . . .

Claudia Lennear—one of Ike and Tina Turner’s ikettes

Darlene Love—worked with legends of '50s and '60s rock and soul (and didn’t always receive proper credit)

Clare Torry—sang on Pink Floyd’s Dark Side of the Moon, among others

Luther Vandross—sang backup for David Bowie, Chic, and Diana Ross before launching a successful solo career

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

What are your favorite song covers? What happens musically, emotionally, aesthetically when different musicians and singers cover the same song?

How is the experience of listening to music live different from listening to a recording?

What musical influences do you hear in Perla Batalla’s sound?

IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

The Visions and Voices Event “Nina—A Story about Me and Nina Simone”

The documentary 20 Feet from Stardom, about backup singers twentyfeetfromstardom.com
ANDREW JUSTICE of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about Leonard Cohen, Perla Batalla, and tonight’s performance. Those with a call number (e.g., books) are physical items which you can find in our campus libraries. Those without a call number (e.g., journal articles and databases) are electronic resources, which you can access through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu.

BOOKS


ARTICLES


AUDIO-VISUAL


Leonard Cohen was a poet, and his lyrics are full of extraordinary poetic moments like these:

- Ring the bells that still can ring
- Forget your perfect offering
- There is a crack in everything
- That’s how the light gets in
  —from “Anthem”
- And what can I tell you my brother, my killer
- What can I possibly say?
- I guess that I miss you, I guess I forgive you
- I’m glad you stood in my way
  —from “Famous Blue Raincoat”
- Like a bird on the wire
- Like a drunk in a midnight choir
- I have tried in my way to be free
  —from “Bird on the Wire”
- There is a war between the rich and poor,
- A war between the man and the woman,
- There is a war between the ones who say there is a war
- And the ones who say there isn’t.
  —from “There Is a War”
- I’ve seen your flag on the marble arch
- Love is not a victory march
- It’s a cold and it’s a broken hallelujah
  —from “Hallelujah”