

**Walter Mercado Salinas**  
**Actor, Dancer, and Writer, and Celebrity Astrologer**  
**1931 – 2019**



Walter Mercado at the History Miami Museum, where an exhibition celebrated 50 years of his career.

Credit...Alberto E. Tamargo/Sipa USA, via Associated Press

Walter Mercado was a cultural icon who brought messages of love, peace and hope into millions of homes across Latin America and the Caribbean. For many families, the day could not begin without reading Walter's horoscope predictions in the newspaper or listening to them on television or radio. Flamboyantly dressed in sequined capes, blazers and vests adorned with ornaments and brooches, he would face the camera and dramatically let his viewers know whether it was going to be a good month or a bad one. People found hope or at least optimism on a difficult day because Walter helped them imagine a better tomorrow. He found his way into homes in Latin America, the Caribbean, as well as the United States, reaching an estimated 120 million viewers per day.

**"When Walter Mercado was a boy, in Puerto Rico, a dying bird fell into his yard. He held it and prayed for it, and the bird flapped its wings and started to fly. A neighbor who was watching concluded that Mercado had been given healing powers by the grace of God. Word spread through the village, and people concluded that Mercado had been given healing powers by the grace of God. Word spread through the village, and people began showing up at his door, begging his mother, "Please, let me see Walter!" She sat the enchanted boy on a special chair, and visitors would line up to touch him. "Then," Mercado recalled many years later, "I turned into Walter of the Miracles."'" ("The Improbable Charisma of Walter Mercado" *The New Yorker*" by Michael Schulman**



Walter Mercado-Salinas was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico on March 9, 1932. His father, José María Mercado was from San Germán, Puerto Rico, and his mother, Aída Salinas was from Catalonia, Spain. Walter inherited his father's deep spirituality and his mother's love for music. As a child, he believed he had mystical power which would," grow into something bigger than himself." As a result of his mother's influence, Walter's first venture into

showbusiness was as a flamenco and ballet dancer in Puerto Rico. He became a prolific dancer and was, for a time, the dance partner of Velda González, a dancer, actor comedian, politician, and former Puerto Rican Senator.

Mercado's show business journey continued as he turned to acting. He appeared on Puerto Rican telenovela shows including *Un Adiós en el Recuerdo* (A Farewell to Memory") and *Larga Distancia* (Long Distance). He appeared in many television serials and later began to tour and act in theaters in several countries and he eventually opened acting school called Walter Actor's Studio 64.



Mercado's career as a larger-than-life astrologer began by accident in 1969 when a guest did not show up for an appearance on Telemundo's *El Show del Medio Día*. Walter, there to promote a play in which he had been cast as a Hindu priest, was asked to do an additional segment in place of the absent guest. Without much time to prepare,

he talked about what he was always talking about: the stars and horoscopes. The show viewers were so taken by his charismatic horoscope reading that they demanded more of Mercado. Three months later, he was hosting his own program on a midday variety show called *El Show de las 12*. Mercado's personality, as well as the eye-catching, brightly colored capes and robes delighted his audiences.

His fame and popularity continued to grow exponentially. By the 1980s his show was broadcast on the Univision Network to channels across Latin America and the United States. In addition to Television and Radio, Walter's horoscopes appeared in many newspapers, magazines, and web pages. His predictions appeared in a daily column in the *Miami Herald*, *El Nuevo Dia* in Puerto Rico, *Hoy* in both Chicago and Los Angeles, *Listin Diario* in the Dominican Republic and many other papers in South and Central America. He also authored 7 books including one titled *Más Alla del Horizonte* (Beyond the Horizon), which was published in three languages—Spanish, English, and Portuguese.



**'When the new year approached, Walter recommended rituals in the extensive special editions of his horoscopes that ran in newspapers, magazines and on TV across Latin America, and following them became a tradition that transcended generations, creeds or faiths. Walter would recommend what color to wear, which candles to burn and even what flowers and perfumes to bathe in before the clock struck midnight in order to start the year off right. Alejandro Álvarez, a poet, described it perfectly in a Facebook post: "Walter was my grandmother, hiding her Santería from my Pentecostal grandfather." -**

**By Ana Teresa Toro, *NY Times*, Nov. 4, 2019**



Mercado's androgynous appearance caused much speculation about his sexuality and for many LGBTQ+ folks, especially within the Latinx community, he served as an icon and role model. His lavish outfits and unashamed expression of creativity and sense of self was an inspiration. It was said, "Walter challenged the notion of gender, and he knew he was a pioneer." During an interview on ["Real America with Jorge Ramos,"](#) Mr. Mercado addressed his sexuality. "The people want to know is Walter straight, homosexual, metrosexual, bisexual — I don't care," he said. "Here I am, I am who I am, that's it." He cited his true love to be his fans, claiming "I don't need a person to make me happy."

**"It's remarkable that a figure as flamboyant as Mercado permeated a culture so steeped in machismo and Catholicism. His more-is-more aesthetic, like that of Liberace, Little Richard, and Siegfried and Roy, was so outrageous as to inoculate him against traditional gender constraints: he was just Walter, the one and only." by Michael Schulman, "The Improbable Charisma of Walter Mercado," *The New Yorker*, July 24, 2020**

On November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019, at the age of 87, Walter Mercado died surrounded by his loving family and friends at Auxilio Mutuo Hospital in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The cause of death was reportedly from kidney failure. He is buried at Señorial Memorial Park in Cupey barrio, San Juan, Puerto Rico. In July 2020, Netflix released a documentary titled *Mucho Mucho Amor* (Much, Much Love) honoring his life and legacy. The film features archival footage of Mercado, as well as interviews by fellow Puerto Rican entertainer Lin Manuel-Miranda and others. It premiered at the 2020 Sundance Film festival. You can see the trailer on You Tube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEJqiucxyrs>

It seems proper to end *Walter Mercado Salinas' Hispanic Heritage Month Biography* in the same way he ended every segment of his shows; “God bless you all, today, tomorrow and always and I hope you receive from me peace, a lot of peace.” Then, as he brought his hands to his lips to blow a kiss to viewers, he would sign off, “Pero sobre todo, mucho, mucho, mucho amor” (But above all, much, much, much love.)



#### TO LEARN MORE

“Walter Mercado, Celebrity Astrologer for Millions of Latinos, Dies,” Sandra E. Garcia – NY Times, Nov. 3, 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/03/world/americas/walter-mercado-dead.html>

“Walter Mercado: There Was a Duality to Everything About Him,” By Ana Teresa Toro -NY Times, Nov. 4, 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/04/arts/walter-mercado-tribute.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article>

“Walter Mercado, Astrologer, Actor and Dancer,” Fundacion Nacional Para La Cultura Popular. <https://prpop.org/biografias/walter-mercado/>

**“The Improbable Charisma of Walter Mercado,”** The New Yorker, July 24, 2020, by Michael Schulman <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-improbable-charisma-of-walter-mercado>