

# The traditional trova: Deeply rooted Cubanness



They called themselves troubadours. They proudly called themselves troubadours. They were bohemians in love with life and they proclaimed it in songs. They sang of Life: they sang of love, of heartbreak, of pain, of beauty, of women.

A troubadour has to write poetry and sing it. A troubadour must be accompanied by the guitar. A troubadour only sings his songs or those of other troubadours. A troubadour responds to another troubadour in song whenever deemed appropriate. A troubadour contributes his song when it is decided to compose a series on a theme. A troubadour does not write his songs, he conveys them live. A troubadour is part of a subculture with its own laws, a musical brotherhood.

Pepe Sanchez. By some window or in a town corner. Sindo Garay. In a friend's backyard or at a bar. Singing, singing and lightening the soul. Alberto Villalón. Guitar chords with rum and a loving voice. Serenading under the moon of Santiago. Miguel Matamoros.

And it was those simple men, without technical knowledge of music, some of them illiterate, who - as fate would have it at the beginning of the last century - created the *Cuban song*.

Before them there were songs in Cuba but more than Cuban, they were songs composed in Cuba. Songs that were sung to the homeland, the landscape, the Cuban woman but that sounded too much like Italian arias, French ballads, Neapolitan songs and swayed like a waltz; a slow, lilting, tropical waltz.

These troubadours managed to amalgamate diverse musical elements that naturally interacted in popular music and conformed a typical, Cuban product. They retained certain ornaments of those European traditions to sing the melodies, kept the short musical introduction and certain harmonic combinations but eliminated the waltz in favor of the danza. So, using a binary measure - more comfortable, more natural for Cuban expression – they organized the musical discourse into two parts whereby - usually - the first is calm, expositional, in a minor key, and the second more jovial, more rhythmical, in a major key, reminiscent of the first contradanzas and danzas of the past.

They continued to sing their natural melodies in two parallel voices until their ingenuity led to two different melodies conceived as a result of the improvised deviations of the second voice. It even came to singing two melodies with different texts. But despite this development complexity is never perceived in them. These songs flow with the clarity of a stream among the stones. And they refresh.

Trova is poetry. Lyricism, delicacy, Creole refinement. There is always something sad or nostalgic in this music rocked by lively rhythms 'sandungueros' that achieves an irresistible balance: grace, elegance and flavor: The essential Cubanness. The deeply rooted Cubanness.

In the shade of a laurel or in the shade of a café awning. Manuel Corona. Under the balcony of a Cuban dame. Under an old street gas lamp. Graciano Gómez. Colored by stained glass standing next to a Cuban mampara. Party guitars, voices perfuming the city. Rosendo Ruíz. María Teresa Vera. Eusebio Delfín. Miguel Companioni. Angel Almenares ...