

# Gustavo Corrales Romero, simple can be beautiful

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By Tania Farias

This past 28 of June I went to the Schott Recital Room located in the heart of London, to attend a concert by Cuban–Dutch pianist Gustavo Corrales Romero. Upon arrival at the venue where the recital was to be given I encountered this person who radiated energy and enthusiasm for his work. With a constant smile on his face, Gustavo answered all of my questions and for half an hour, spoke about his music, his education, his career and his projects.



Somewhat later, the recital began and from the first chord I felt surrounded by sounds and rhythms that felt familiar and foreign at the same time. Within a couple of seconds, I found myself transported to the Cuba of the 1900s and I strangely felt nostalgia for a country in which I had never been and for an era in which I have not lived. With every new interpretation, Gustavo took us to a different place and during the approximately 70 minutes that the recital lasted, those present visited Venezuela, Aruba, Paraguay and Curaçao, among other countries.

Gustavo Corrales Romero boasts a long and important musical formation, initiated at a very young age in his native Cuba. He subsequently had the opportunity to study at the renowned Conservatory P.I. Tchaikovsky in Moscow. In the course of his career, Gustavo has explored different musical styles, starting with the classical composers such as Bach, Mozart, Schubert, passing through contemporary music to arrive at his new mission of interpreting Latin American academic composers of the nineteenth century.

*“Lately, I’m dedicating myself to the interpretation of the music of Latin American classical composers, which have different aesthetic tendencies and although all are based on musical nationalism, some recreate the popular styles more than others. There are pieces that are practically transcripts of a Venezuelan Joropo, but others are more of a recreation of something, for example, what Marlos Nobre has made of the Frevo, a street dance born in Pernambuco, Brazil. The man has made an*

*interpretation in music of what this dance is supposed to be, which is very alive, very acrobatic. He has made the dance his own through off-beats, accents, syncopation.”*

During our conversation Gustavo told me how his interest for this type of music, inspired by popular and folkloric Latin American rhythms, was born.

*“I’ve grown tired with European classical music. Our formation is classical, traditional. From the age of seven one enters into the educational system and there are exams after exams and national competitions to advance to the consecutive levels. It is pretty serious. And all that time it was Mozart, Schubert; all the European classics in the same way in the visual art educational system the classics are Tintoretto, Rembrandt. In Cuba I wasn’t interested in Latin American or Cuban music. To my taste this was too ordinary. Of course this was youthful ignorance. But once I left Cuba, the interest emerged to read all the Cuban composers and writers that I hadn’t read before. I think this happens to everyone who emigrates; the distance draws us closer. So I became very interested in this literature and also in Cuban music.”*



*“When I left the Superior Institute for Art I devoted myself to playing the contemporary music of the composers of my generation. I never felt more pleasure than that. It was very strange, dissonant music, with a very high level of complexity. It is music that you have to understand, not enjoy. I’m through with that. Now I think that music should simply be received.”*

The pianist has recorded three albums, of which two as a soloist. His first recording was made in Cuba as part of a line-up of performers of the compositions created by renowned Cuban composer Harold Gramatges (Correction by translator). However, his first solo album he recorded after his departure from the Caribbean island. *“My first solo CD, **Palimpsesto**, didn’t concern Schubert or Mozart, but Latin American composers from the nineteenth century to date. And this last CD has been made for my mother and my grandmother, a CD that you can put on in the car so that it caresses your ears. Even the design of the cover is a reproduction of the tiles in our house, dating from the nineteenth century. These are Art Nouveau tiles. But, don’t be confused, when I speak of simplicity this does not mean that there are just two notes. No. I’m talking about what the music*

*conveys. It's simple to the ear, but these are works by composers with an academic background who know counterpoint and traditional and modern harmony."*



According to the artist an important evolution has taken place between his first recording and his second CD, entitled *Fresco*. *"First the range of composers was expanded, on the other hand I have no more interest in proving anything. This music is unknown in Europe or perhaps not sufficiently liked, but not in my experience; because whenever I play, orthodox people who like only classical music come to me to say – I did not know that kind of music existed, how very nice –"*

On the contribution of Latin Americans to the world of classical music, Gustavo said: *"What Latin Americans can contribute is already being demonstrated by that fabulous project that is 'El Sistema' [The System] of (youth) orchestras of Venezuela. I'm very impressed by it. Music as it was taught to us is: Grab your instrument, rehearse meticulously, study everything, perfect everything and then sit in the concert hall and play. For the children of the orchestras it is part of their daily existence. I get the impression that it is not a profession you have to learn, even if you like it, even if it is calling, it's like a part of their lives and that makes that they approach it in a more natural and more organic way."*

Besides music, Gustavo Corrales also recently dabbled in literature with his first book entitled *Los herederos* (The Protectorate). For him, there is an intimate relationship between music and literature. *"If you as a child have been involved in the arts making music and you have a notion of the rhythm, tempo and organization of a piece; when there is a climax, when to continue, when there is silence, the internal rhythm of a piece, all that also applies to literature."*

Regarding *Los herederos*, Gustavo told me *"A simple book also. The first thing that surprised everyone who knows me, was the language of the book and the atmosphere. Everyone expected a 'brick' from me; a complicated, detailed book. But I gravitated towards simplicity and my first book is written in a language of the street. I wrote an account taking place in the 1970s, when I was a kid, and I was a child of the province, where educational standards are much more rigid. The book is*

*about Guantánamo, a small place with clean streets.” He also told me a little about what his second book will be: “This second book is also about Guantánamo. Less colloquial, more intense. Four stories of four of the city’s eras: Nineteenth century slavery, the Republic, the Revolution and the future.”*

To conclude our interview Gustavo Corrales told me about his future plans. *“There are a couple of things we’re trying to accomplish, we would like to go to Spain and Portugal. Next year we’d like to go to New York. And maybe this year we will also go to Aruba. As such, the plan is to keep playing, keep playing, keep publishing, this is our world.”*

### **Note by KyG Productions**

Tania Farias attended the 28 June 2012 concert at the Schott Recital Room in London representing Ventana Latina.

Original link <http://www.ventanalatina.co.uk/2012/08/gustavo-corrales-romero-lo-simple-es-hermoso/>