



Carlos Fariñas Cantero

## FARIÑAS

I was using an analogy to explain to some friends something that I don't remember now. I told them: "It's as if they would now suddenly tell us that the earth isn't round", when a voice behind me said: "The earth isn't round. The earth is like an irregular rock that the atmosphere makes to seem round". And Carlos Fariñas stayed with us, lecturing about the stars. I now consider how lucky I was to have been young in his orbit, and the years of having known and having relations with someone who was already a paradigm of Cuban culture back then.

Beyond his vast work as a composer, Fariñas was part of the vortex of artistic life and musical education in Cuba during the second half of the 20th century.

A man of vision and cyclonic will, he founded and directed academic institutions, created chairs, organized festivals, revitalized the curricula of musical education, rescued very important forgotten scores, organized series of concerts and lectures to expand the Cuban musical panorama, extended his knowledge to the masses through didactic series of music appreciation, published comprehensive essays on the theory and history of music, fostered the creation of symphonic and chamber institutions, launched the careers of young performers who would become great musicians, trained young people who would become important composers, taught courses at European and North American universities... in short, he touched almost everything and turned almost everything into gold.

Our first meeting was in 1986. Since I was a child I had been hearing his name mentioned by my music teachers, who referred to him in such a way that I had him in the same pantheon as Bach, Beethoven, Stravinsky and Roldán. Shortly after my 16th birthday, my maestro César López gave me an almost illegible score of a recently composed piano work: *Altagracia* by Carlos Fariñas. He made me learn it, we worked on it, and one fine day he told me that I would be performing it before the composer so that he could give me some pointers on its interpretation. It was at that moment that I realized that Fariñas was a person, someone real, alive, flesh and blood, who walked, who dressed himself... My heart wanted to leap out of my chest.

The day came and we went to meet him at the Superior Institute for Art (ISA). He appeared before us hurriedly, informally, and without preamble or protocol we got to work. He was direct, concise, without metaphors or digressions, always to the point. And I understood that as the man was, was his music.

Fariñas's music is natural. That is its strength, its power of fascination and perhaps its victory over Time.

All of his erudition, his technical mastery, his knowledge of styles, of concepts, never disturb that quality of naturalness in his music. Fariñas uses his meticulous sense of the craft so that it always flows, is always understood, always enjoyed, always moves us. That is why we have the impression that what he composes is easy, that it has been achieved without effort. Here is a miracle. How miraculous it is to calculatedly organize musical discourse and transmit it as a spontaneous occurrence. What level of wisdom must be reached so that all of history, the techniques, the influences, all of the knowledge accumulated over the years, do not emerge in the work except as the naturalness it emanates.

Fariñas' music is natural and because it is natural it is frank and everything that he wants to express is perceived by the listener in a transparent way. What it transmits touches us without artifice, without ostentation, without excesses. From an intimate piece for guitar to his symphonic music, we are always in the presence of a cordial act that we embrace with ease, that we understand from the first glance and in which we believe.

Fariñas' music is frank and because it is frank, it is Cuban. And how lucky that he would apply his genius to what is Cuban! His organized and neat Cubanness. Daring, although perhaps more lunar than solar. More Amelia than Wifredo but more Guillén, less Lezama. Not as much Porro as Románach. More guitar than drum: Stained glass windows, bongos and the smell of the countryside, always the smell of the countryside.

How lucky that he bequeathed us, pianists, the exquisite *Sones sencillos*, that masterful musical compendium of Cubanness, that treatise of integration and synthesis; the colossal *Altagracia*, with its overflowing pianism, a capital work of Cuban pianistics. The intimate *Trinitaria* and *Habanera* rooted in the almost domestic tradition of Cervantes. All works to which pianists return again and again, generation after generation. Works that I have played and will continue to play with the same pleasure.

The last time we spoke I was in my 30s and he was months away from death. I wanted to record the *Sones sencillos* and I called him from Aruba to ask for his permission. He told me: "You don't have to pay me absolutely anything. For me it is an honor that you are the one who records them. As far as I know, no one has recorded all of them." That was his last lesson. That was more than 15 years ago, however every time I remember it my throat tightens and my heart constricts... and for me Fariñas grows a little bit more.