
Let's Hope Trova doesn't Fade Suddenly

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The Nueva Trova movement, born in the early years of the Cuban Revolution, transformed the aesthetics of song at world level. However, although there are several places dedicated to the trova movement, the musical likes of most youths today put growing distance today from those roots.

The reasons for the distancing can be many, although experts on the subject assure this is mainly to the influence of the products of a globalized music industry or the scarce promotion of author's song in the media.

Chronology of a random song

By mid XIX century, the trova appears in Cuba as an irregular phenomenon a byproduct of improvised song and other attempts of the popular music from the nineteenth century. After several periods, the genre acquires a tendency for the poetic creation and musicalized literature, represented in the voices of Sindo Garay, Manuel Corona, Alberto Villalón and other important singers.

Nowadays, the children of the nueva trova movement, the very new and contemporary, live within a single category of the song. However, it seems that so much diversity is not enough, because the young public feels less and less identified with the genre.

This is manifested in the results of a survey applied to a sample of fifty students at the University of Havana, where it was verified that most of interviewed are identified with pop music, hip-hop, and reggaeton, and they limit the spectrum of trova to the images of Silvio Rodríguez, and Pablo Milanes.

Same results were reflected for twenty students at Saúl Delgado High School, in Vedado neighborhood, and other

ten youths from Rubén Martínez Villena secondary school. They expressed their preference for dance music like reggaeton, and they associated trova as something out of fashion or that only a minority of university students or intellectuals like.

The root of the phenomenon could be found in the insufficient popularization troubadours have in the media, as well as the nonexistence of a cultural strategy that prioritizes, without imposing likes, the presence of this genre.

The trova without criticism is not moving forward

Several press professionals take critical positions on this matter and they expose overtly the deficiencies of the process of cultural promotion.

Joaquín Borges Triana, journalist of *El Caiman Barbudo*, expressed that the media establishes a link of this type of songs with solemn moments and mournful dates, discarding works of excellent quality from their systematic musical programming.

In that sense, Michel Hernández, reporter for *Granma Newspaper*, affirmed that lately the application of domestic political-cultural strategy is not in correspondence with obligations of the artistic projects that, instead of presenting questions on reality and social dynamics, they offer the public musical products lacking a measuring and critical look.

«The objective of the communicators must be, in this environment, to have the media interested in a more alternative culture, authentic, inquiring more in our reality, supporting it and condition its recognition in the population, in an attempt to keep vital area of the Cuban creation», he added.

«It is not to censor reggaeton or any other genre, it is known the damage created by censorship in Cuba. It doesn't mean either that everything within trova is good, there are also mediocre stuff everywhere, but if the media made known these projects more, perhaps many younger would attend to the sessions of troubadours, hence trova and these non-commercial spaces would not be practically a ghetto», affirmed Hernández.

On top of this appears the music critic which according to Borges Triana, undergoes its worst moments, just when there is a greater diversity of publications, either printed as digital. The cause falls into two fundamental questions: the absence of specialized magazines in music and the lack of specialized methodologies at the universities that could help to this opinion genre.

«The solution would be to design an educational system in which, maybe at graduate level, trains professionals with the elementary tools to make critic because journalists, a group I'm proud to belong to, doesn't usually masters the technical tools to carry it out, and the musicologists ignore the journalistic techniques to write it down», added the specialist.

Another strong point to keep in mind is the likes of young audiences. Unfortunately trova is not near the top of the list, largely because of the cultural blending which takes place worldwide and it's also felt in our country.

For Triana, nowadays with the boost of new technologies, the shaping of likes aims rather at the mp3, the *flash memory*, the exchange of information in digital support which in the long run become cultural and musical expressions with low aesthetic quality, regrettably those are the ones with greater consumption level by the large audiences.

«In most cases, these digital preferences drag youth to cognitive voids that can be found in other supports like books, and limits the enjoyment of good poetry because of the absence of a previous preparation for it», he concluded.

Another explanation given by the journalist and director of *Caiman Barbudo* magazine, he affirmed that «most of the media have used simplistic and misleading media concepts of what art is, even how to assimilate music as art. The first thing to do is teaching people the melodic richness and how to appreciate it, then rebuild the promotion mechanisms of trova».

He says trova has never had a mechanism for making the video clips, and it's incredible that the trova movement doesn't have a foundation like that of rock, rap, and hip hop.

Promotion strategies

Promotion strategies are arranged among the artists, the Company they are member of, the Cuban Institute of Music (CIM), and the media.

Natasha Vázquez, head specialist of Communication at the CIM, alleged that despite the prioritized treatment to troubadours, promotion projects don't usually bring the desired effect. The blame can be put to a bad administration of the musical companies, the indifference of artists toward these issues or the lack of intent in the way of disclosing certain artistic manifestations in the media.

Vázquez stressed the last option, expressing that the very few times the media repeat the information, that regarding trova, are presented in the press conferences given by the CIM at the end of every month.

«On the other hand, domestic newspapers give little space to cultural matters, and music is not always the most mentioned. Radio stations are more receptive with the singer and songwriters, but themselves minimizes the used of 99 existent radio stations in Cuba. Artists prefer instead the screen, without realizing that proposals broadcasted there are lower in number, air time and weekly frequency in comparison with other options», added the specialist.

Yet for the freshly graduate Paola Cabrera there's another angle to the existing problem: «Troubadours like those "trova-addicts" many times lack the will or the tools to be noticed. I know many troubadours with interesting musical proposals, with chances of getting inside the market (the music market is not just disk selling, but the capacity to summon the public) and they don't take advantage of it since they don't understand that their work is not just the creation but also the promotion of their work».

«Maybe, the problem lies in the troubadour's philosophy, he is a musician of the so-called counterculture that seeks an art far from the demands of the market, but it must be re-evaluated. Well staying away from the market means losing the possibility of increasing the amount of people that approach this kind of music», asserted.

On the other hand, Michel Hernández considers that troubadours need to look for popularization strategies using new technologies and experiment sometimes with other trends that use not only the guitar, seeking a catch without quitting the song.

In an article written by Bladimir Zamora, troubadour Tony Ávila reveals that his generation is afraid of taking risks, it needs to rescue itself from isolation and act in self-defense, since nobody will do it for us.

The music critic Joaquín Borges Triana says that to solve this situation that trova and troubadours live today doesn't depend on a single institution, but on a systemic work where all sides work together: the media (the radio, the TV), the presentation spaces where culture is made live and the very musicians.

An image is worth more than a thousand songs

The disadvantage of troubadours on TV in contrast with other creators is demonstrated in a couple of figures presented by Maricela Lastra, Musical Programs of the Cuban Institute of Radio and Television.

According to Lastra the number of musical programs reaches 16 at present distributed in the different channels of the Cuban Television, but only four show troubadours "Cuerda Viva", coproduced wit Hermanos Saiz Association (AHS), "Piso 6", "23 y M" and "Entre Amigos" the two latter have one-time guests.

«This limits the expansion platforms of the new voices of the trova movement that at times prefer to switch to other genres with more presence in the media», said the ICRT official.

Other experts proposed interesting angles. For example, Caridad Zayas, scriptwriter for Cuerda Viva show, affirmed that excessive segmentation of music is not advisable in a media as massive as television. She proposed, to create spaces with a balance capable of drawing the public's attention and give a space to diversity of the Cuban song in the entire TV listing.

«That's where the media would play the role of communicative innovators that associate the artistic production with the current context and the stereotypes of youth», assured Zayas.

Troubadours like Charly Salgado when asked about the spaces that promote the song in the media, he warned that «programs should not be made to meet a goal of amount of hours and broadcast it on a channel but with the objective of showing with an interesting and novel view the song, the trova and its creators. To do it otherwise would unleash a negative promoting effect ».

Subsidize the trova movement?

Borges Triana says «today the ups and downs of life lead us to the fact that the culture to be preserved has to be negotiated, independent, to be subsidized by itself. That means that certain things that had more affordable prices, even things that were free today are not anymore and I think this will increase in coming times».

«It is part of a process we are living that is called the upgrade of the economic model. Although I think the State will preserve certain cultural expressions and will favor the traditional art, the symphonic and chamber world which are expressions bound to the law of offer/demand of the market or else they'd die, but other manifestations must find a way of contributing to its survival from the material point of view; that is what is happening to the trova», he said.

However, the also cultural promoter, Fidel Díaz Castro, sustains that the poetry, with this phenomenon of reggaeton should not be charged until a like for the genre is created in the public. «What is happening at present is that instead of promoting cultural mechanisms that help troubadours against this competition the Ministry of Culture facilitates spaces where every day the access to poetry and trova is more expensive ».

«It is necessary on the contrary to make a deep investment in the ideology in the broader sense of the word, to invest in the best of the authentic culture because a pseudo-culture has been internationalized that sells itself», asserted Díaz Castro.

Michel Contreras says that with the new economic design many projects of trova have been reduced to night clubs with quite expensive prices like the Bertolt Brecht, El Sauce, where popular troubadours perform like Tony Ávila, Ray Fernandez, among others, but people cannot see them because they can't afford it. On the other hand, the large outdoor gigs are lost, those of Casa de las Americas and at theaters, he pointed out.

Likewise, Iroel Sanchez, one of the directors of the cultural space La Pupila Asombrada, believes necessary the existence of politics that connect the aesthetic vanguards with the people and with important sectors of society. «We have the inverted pyramid model in society and regrettably creation is being subordinated to those who can pay, whom in the end impose their likes».

«Hence, the space *La Pupila Asombrada* that takes place the last Friday of every month is free. It is a cultural project of Fidel Díaz Castro, the Young Communist League, Journalism Institute that is not limited to trova, but to the music that is not subordinated to the market. Troubadours like Raúl Torres, Gerardo Alfonso, Diego Gutiérrez have participated».

«This space is an effort to demonstrate that those values. Trova can be seductive if promoted appropriately and that people are not enemy of committed contents, but rather we have to present them in an attractive way», said Sánchez.

From the positions of the different specialists it shows the concern to attain a successful promotion of trova and its members. There are several matters to solve if this and other worth manifestations of art are to be salvaged. But it's pointless to identify the possible problems if not act accordingly. Our country promoter of the best culture should reassess priorities and to counterattack the foreign options with projects of rediscovery of our roots and potentialities.

So that the trova movement doesn't fade suddenly it's mandatory to create affordable spaces for everyone, where the one and true culture is proposed, the culture of the people. The other fact, the commercial issue created in making-money labs, not only affects the artistic capacity of creators, but the youth that is at risk of getting used to live without poetry.