
Pure Feeling!

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Past February 28th, Elena Burke would turn 90 years old. She was (is) one of the greatest Cuban singers of all times, key character of feeling. We approach that huge career...

Those were the years of splendor of feeling, that expression that fed from our deepest musical traditions and also (to a certain degree) of jazz, the music of blacks. The feeling was not just a genre; it was an attitude towards life, a feeling. Among all the singers who defended this genre (who really felt it), a group of stars, creatures of Havana nights, among all those singers who sang and told as if singing were saying and vice versa, among all of them one shone above the rest: Elena Burke.

Many people consider Elena to be the most complete and autochthonous singers of the Cuban song. There is no way of deciding those hierarchies in art; it's not healthy to do so either. The truth is that Elena was unique. A warm voice, of deep resonances, a singular scenic presence (she went on stage—says a friend of mine who saw her sing in night clubs in the 60's—and everything else ceased to exist, you could not help but look at her), a very eloquent sensuality when saying...

Elena discovered unsuspected twists to the songs she performed, and not just from the musical point of view (her variations were delicious, she gave them interesting melodic lines, always coherent with the spirit of the song); also in the intentions, in the interpretation. She multiplied the senses, she went beyond the lyrics, she suggested without the need of being explicit.

Good taste, natural good taste that was not attached to the Cuban spice. Funny, she was indeed, vulgar never—I heard her say once in a radio show. It had to do, of course, with her training, by the hand of rigorous teachers; but mainly, with the respect to the public.

She could be hilarious, but also harrowingly dramatic. Her transitions could be sudden and overwhelming. With a unique economy of expressions, moving just the necessary, she was able to recreate an atmosphere.

Mrs. Feeling, no better nickname for her. She sang songs written by the greatest authors in our panorama. Everyone admired her. She had tons of followers; she still has them, 15 years after her death. That voice is saved.

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