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My songs express political commitment to just causes

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Singer-songwriter Gerardo Alfonso, author of “Sábanas Blancas” and “Son los sueños” talks about his music and solidarity work.

The work of singer-songwriter Gerardo Alfonso, beyond music, has also been to accompany the struggle of solidarity with Cuba organizations in different parts of the world, delivering the message of the Cuban Revolution’s resistance in the face of imperialism, the common enemy of humanity.

Speaking to the artist, he noted that his songs express a political commitment to just causes defended around the world. His music was present in the struggle for the return of Elián González in 2000, kidnapped in Miami; and during the battle for the return of the Five Cuban Heroes incarcerated for more than 15 years in the U.S.

“I have worked with solidarity groups since the 1980s, especially with Latin American movements. In the 90s, I traveled to Italy several times, invited by the Communist Refoundation organization, and I performed concerts in defense of the Cuban Revolution.

“In the following years I participated in different acts and mobilizations against the blockade, in front of the United States Embassy in Berlin. Also to collect donations for Cuba following the occurrence of extreme weather events. I did the same work in Belgium, France. and several Latin American countries. I attended the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and another similar event in Cancun, Mexico. I have been invited on several occasions to the fair

organized by newspaper **L'Humanité**, organ of the French Communist Party.

“My contribution is my singing. I think that art contributes to the struggles against injustice in the world. Songs alone do not change ways of thinking, or circumstances, but help to raise awareness of ideas to improve and win battles in society.”

**We just heard you play a song, the lyrics of which could relate to the miserable Helms-Burton Act. How did it come about?**

I composed that song in 2018, it's called “Qué le quiten lo bailado a otro,” and with it I intend to demand my legitimate right and claim that this island belongs to me, as well as to all Cubans. I was inspired by the statements of a grandson of gangster Meyer Lansky.

Today, the U.S. administration, presided by Donald Trump, is encouraging the filing of property claims, many of them acquired in dirty dealings supported by puppet governments before the triumph of the Revolution.

In recent days, claims have been made by alleged owners of the port of Santiago de Cuba. To them, we Cubans say they cannot claim what is the common property of the people.

I was born in Cuba and I grew up in Havana. My family, my friends and my cultural work are from this land and nobody can take that from me.

Art has the quality of captivating people's sentiments with its discourse. I call it polysemy. When composing a song, I refer to a topic that can be used in another historical moment, other circumstances or with different groups of people, and that is why I think that song has a vitality and validity.

**Do you think “Sábanas Blancas” dedicated to Havana, and “Son los sueños” are still considered anthems?**

People's reaction to those songs really moves me. When I arrive at an activity with my guitar or with my group, within 15 minutes, the audience always requests “Sábanas Blancas,” but when I sing the song I look at them, and people nearby also pay attention to me.

One day I sang in Pabellón Cuba, and on nearby 21st Street some workers on scaffolding were painting a building. When I played the first chords and said “Havana...,” those workers stopped their work to listen to me. Iconic melodies spark that behavior.

The song “Son los sueños” was born in November 1996. It resisted all the transformations of history and has survived the times, enjoying a love that the people profess. On October 8, 2017, I was in Santa Cruz Department, Bolivia, precisely where Che was killed. There is a wall there full of slogans and messages written by those who visit.

That day, the Cuban forensic doctor who directed the investigations to identify Che's remains, Jorge González Pérez, was the speaker at an act. I heard him and felt in that environment that Che was watching us. Then, I asked to sing my song dedicated to that great man. I don't think I have ever sung it with such emotion as that which overwhelmed me when I was there. I think those are the lasting effects of the song. It has a spirituality that is difficult to describe.

**In your songs you state that you are going to die in Cuba. Why?**

In the early 90's I traveled through Italy. It was a moment of great uncertainty for Cubans because a never-before experienced economic crisis ensued. I could have stayed to live in any country, to be more comfortable. But singing at solidarity events reinforced my convictions.

First, because the press and communications messages in capitalist societies lie with respect to Cuba. In addition, they pour scorn on our conquests with words like dictatorship, lack of freedom, or others that are more present in those societies than in ours.

What greater dictatorship than that of consumption? Its limit is in the money you can accumulate in your pocket. There are many goods that make life more comfortable, but not all have access to them. I decided on that artistic tour through Italy that I would live in Cuba, and that it is only here that I want to die.

### **Are you the man you dreamed of being?**

Not yet. There are things that I would have liked to do that I have not yet achieved. I still have a lot to write and say in my songs. But I cannot scorn what life has given me. A song like "Sábanas Blancas" makes any artist proud. It penetrates the sentiment of Cubans, wherever they are and of any age. That's my great privilege, and for that I feel very happy. Although I am eternally dissatisfied.

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