

CHAPTER 5

Transformations in *Nueva Trova*

There is no revolutionary art as yet. There are the elements of this art, there are hints and attempts at it, and, what is most important, there is the revolutionary man, who is forming the new generation in his own image and who is more and more in need of this art. How long will it take . . . to manifest itself clearly? It is difficult even to guess. . . . But why should not this art, or at least its first big wave, come soon as the expression of the art of the young generation which was born in the revolution and which carries it on?

LEON TROTSKY, *Art and Revolution*

Despite its broad impact, surprisingly little of substance has been written about *nueva trova*,¹ the music most closely associated with the Cuban Revolution. My primary interest in this repertoire concerns its changes in status through the years. *Nueva trova* began as an oppositional form of expression in aesthetic terms and sometimes in political terms. During its early years it was referred to as *canción protesta* (protest song) and provided a unique perspective on the revolution for those willing to listen. As a result of their nonconformity, young *trovadores* often ran afoul of the police and cultural organizations through about 1971. After that time, attitudes toward them began to change. Within a few years they had received dramatically increased exposure on radio and television, eventually becoming international symbols of a new socialist culture.

Since then, first-generation artists have tended to work within government institutions rather than outside them. While many remain creatively active and influential, they no longer represent the same constituency or issues as they did in the 1960s, and in their place new generations have emerged. This essay provides information on the history of *nueva trova*, examining the conflicts of early artists with authorities and the process by which the movement was transformed from a voice of marginality into a component of state-supported music making. Younger *trovadores* of the 1990s and beyond now distinguish their songs from those of past decades by referring to them as *novísima trova*. Whether written on the island or abroad, they continue to demonstrate a degree of freshness and irreverence that characterized the movement when it began.

DEFINING *NUEVA TROVA*

Nueva trova cannot be understood without considering the turbulent political conditions of much of the developing world in the mid-twentieth century. In large part, this resulted from challenges to colonialism by groups who had been under political or economic domination for as long as three and a half centuries. Political agitation reflected a radicalization of the disenfranchised, a violent struggle for more equitable distribution of wealth and property within states that had achieved independence. Examples are plentiful; one has only to consider the Chinese Revolution or the campaigns to free Indonesia and India from the Dutch and British in the 1940s to recognize their magnitude. Similar events took place shortly thereafter in North Africa and French Indochina, as well as protests of a distinct but related nature in the United States in conjunction with the Civil Rights movement. Activism in all of these countries was roughly contemporary with the campaign that Fidel Castro began against Fulgencio Batista in 1953.

In Central and South America, the 1950s and 1960s witnessed land reform campaigns in Guatemala, leftist guerrilla warfare in Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, and Uruguay, independence movements in Jamaica and Puerto Rico, and the development of *negritude* and *noirisme* in the French Caribbean and of a popularly elected socialist government in Chile. Even the appearance of brutal right-wing dictatorships in Brazil and elsewhere can be viewed as part of this same process, a reaction against the increasing demands of the working classes and rural poor for political change. Revolution in Cuba was thus far from an isolated occurrence, and in fact members of many constituencies cited above developed their own song repertoires similar to *nueva trova* in an attempt to represent their experiences. It was in this overarching context, beginning in the mid-1960s, that “the political lid came off the pot” as one singer has described it (Feliú 1997:9–10) and new forms of musical expression emerged to complement new social orders.

Nueva trova owes a debt to the efforts of folklorists and musicians in Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay, where Latin American protest song first achieved widespread popularity. Authors frequently cite Argentine Atahualpa Yupanqui (Héctor Roberto Chavero, 1908–92) and Chilean Violeta Parra (1918–67) as early influential composers who championed the arts of indigenous peoples and other marginal groups as well as the social issues pertinent to them. *Nueva canción* in South America developed in part out of reactions to the onslaught of consumer culture from the United States and Europe after World War II as well as heavy foreign investment in local economies. Its early songs were implicitly political in that they incorporated indigenous

instruments (*charangos, zamponas, quenás, bombos*) and folkloric styles (*huayno, milonga, zamba, chacarera*) largely ignored by the South American media. In this way, *nueva trova* was preceded by *nueva canción* and represents part of a host of related movements throughout the Spanish-speaking world and beyond.² However, significant musical differences exist between the movements. *Nueva canción* represented an attempt to valorize folk traditions that were absent in the national media. By contrast, early *nueva trova* represented something different, a conscious break with local influences and an effort to create a cosmopolitan blend of local and international genres (Kirk and Padura Fuentes 2001:5).

Nueva trova is the best-known form of Cuban protest song today but is far from the first. The origins of socially conscious music stretch back in time as far as documentation exists, well over one hundred fifty years. Certainly the stage presentations of the *teatro vernáculo* were notorious for their references to contemporary politics, especially issues related to the revolution against Spain beginning in the 1860s (Moore 1997:43–45).³ Later works by individual *trovador*-artists of the early twentieth century included praise of war heroes Antonio Maceo and Máximo Gómez and outcry over policies of U.S. military intervention and foreign control of Cuban farmlands (Mateo Palmer 1988:136–67). Similar works date from the Batista years. One might suggest that an unbroken legacy of protest song stretches back into Cuba's past and that the prominence of *nueva trova* owes as much to its eventual promotion by the government as to any inherent "newness" in lyrical terms.

Publications from Cuba often suggest that the most direct predecessor of *nueva trova* is *vieja trova*. This is the name for the music of individual singer-songwriters and guitarists from the turn of the century such as Pepe Sánchez (1854–1918), Sindo Garay (1867–1983), Alberto Villalón (1882–1955), and Rosendo Ruiz Sr. (1885–1983). Robbins (1990:443) notes that both styles are intended to be listened to rather than danced, a fairly atypical characteristic of Caribbean popular music, and are performed by small groups in informal settings. Both emphasize the importance of song texts and convey emotional messages. More problematically, *vieja trova* is associated with the urban poor—semi-literate tobacco workers, tailors, and barbers, often black and mulatto—while their counterparts in the 1960s and 1970s were university educated (Benmayor 1981:20). Related to *vieja trova* is the *flin* (or feeling) repertory of the 1950s, whose exponents include César Portillo de la Luz, José Antonio Méndez, and Ángel Díaz. *Flin* is characterized by intimate, romantic pieces employing ample use of modulation and chromaticism, a fusion of the Cuban *canción* (romantic song) tradition with influences from North American jazz. Prominent *nueva trova* artists, most notably Pablo Mi-

lanés and Martín Rojas, began their careers as interpreters of *flin*. Others, including the group Los Cañas, made jazzy, multipart vocals in the style of the Swingle Singers a prominent component of their music.

Another influence on the musical substance of *nueva trova* comes from rural dance repertoire. As a matter of fact, the first compositions embraced by government officials as “revolutionary” after 1959 bore little resemblance to the innovative *trova* of younger artists. They sounded instead almost exactly like prerevolutionary music, differing only in lyrical content. Older, established figures such as the duo Los Compadres sang songs of admiration about the lives of Fidel Castro and Camilo Cienfuegos, praised literacy campaigns, and discussed housing reform policy using the *son* and *son guajiro*.⁴ This group, founded in 1949, initially included Lorenzo Hierrezuelo (1907–93) and Francisco Repilado (1907–2003), better known as Compay Segundo. In 1959 the two quarreled, and Lorenzo Hierrezuelo began singing instead with his younger brother, Reynaldo (b. 1926). Typically, Lorenzo played rhythm guitar and Reynaldo, a double-stringed lead guitar with a sound similar to the *tres* (a small, guitarlike instrument used to play melodies rather than to strum). The example below is a lyrical excerpt from the Los Compadres *son* composition “Se acabarán los bohíos” (The Rustic Hovels Will Be Gone). It is taken from the final *montuno* section and is sung in traditional call-and-response style. Vocals by the soloist and chorus are punctuated with flourishes on the bongo drum, claves, maracas, and guitar.

Una vivienda *mi compay*
 Un apartamento *mi compay*
 Para cada familia *mi compay*
 En la Sierra Maestra *mi compay*
 En toda Cuba *mi compay*
 Se acabaron los bohíos *mi compay*
 Con mucho trabajo *mi compay*
 Con la microbrigada *mi compay*
 De la construcción *mi compay*
 Quedará algún bohío *mi compay*
 Para el museo *mi compay*
 En la Sierra Maestra *mi compay*.

A dwelling place *my friend*
 An apartment *my friend*
 For every family *my friend*
 In the Sierra Maestra *my friend*
 All across Cuba *my friend*
 The rustic hovels are finished *my friend*
 With our hard work *my friend*

With the microbrigades *my friend*
 Helping in the construction *my friend*
 Perhaps a few huts will remain *my friend*
 As museum pieces *my friend*
 In the Sierra Maestra *my friend*.

(Hierrezuelo and Hierrezuelo n.d.;
 italics indicate choral response)

Instrumental string traditions and *copla* and *décima* poetry derived from Spain have also had a significant impact on *nueva trova*.⁵ Alfredo Carol, Pedro Luis Ferrer, and Alberto Faya (the latter from Grupo Moncada) are but a few of the writers known for incorporating such elements into their songs. A tension between the creation of works based on traditional genres and of other works with cosmopolitan influences has characterized *nueva trova* virtually since its inception.

Finally, rock and folk rock from the United States and Britain arguably represent the most important influence on the development of *nueva trova*, a fact that is rarely discussed at length in Cuban literature and which contributed to the movement's controversial reception in its formative years. Indeed, some assert that *nueva trova* is the equivalent of Cuban rock. Rock performance began on the island in the late 1950s with Elvis Presley imitators featured in Havana nightclubs. Singers Danny Puga, Jorge Bauer, and Luis Bravo began copying the style shortly thereafter (Manduley López 1997:136–38). The popularity of rock increased steadily over the next decade, and by the early 1970s it had become more popular among Cuban youth than any other music (Calzado 1996, interview). Los Astros, Los Dada, Los Vampiros, and a host of other bands flourished despite the fact that they never received recognition or support from the government and in many cases were forced to play on homemade instruments. In the later 1970s and 1980s, Cuban rock lost some popularity. This was due to many factors, including strong interest in *nueva trova*, a resurgence in dance music, and the departure of prominent *rockeros* as part of the Mariel exodus (Manduley López 1997:136–38).

Interest in rock varied somewhat among first-generation protest singers, but in general they were avid fans who incorporated influences from British and North American songs directly into their music. Noel Nicola and Vicente Feliú began their musical careers in the mid-1960s playing Elvis and Beatles covers and emulating rock combos such as Los Gnomos and Los Kent (Díaz Pérez 1994:143); eventually they wrote similar *nueva trova* music. Pedro Luis Ferrer performed for a time with Los Dada (Orejuela Martínez 2004:264). *Trovador* Alejandro "Virulo" García (b. 1955) also began as a rock entertainer in the band Los Sioux (Piñeiro 1989). Though Cuba's cultural

EXAMPLE 6. "Son de Cuba a Puerto Rico." Pablo Milanés, *Pablo Milanés* cantautor: *No me pidas* (1997).

8 $\text{♩} = 160$ Emin A7 D Dmin7 G7
 Vocal Puer - to Ri - co a - la que ca - yó al mar
 8 Guitar
 5 C F#7 B7
 que no pu - do vo - lar yo te in - vi -
 8 Emin Emin/G A D G7
 to a mi vue - lo y bus - ca - mos jun - tos el mis - mo cie - lo

establishment was unsupportive of rock at the time, it was oddly in the homes of PCC members that it first flourished.

The children of the politicians were rock fanatics, and in the houses of the leadership the same people who were prohibiting rock on the TV and the radio in many cases paid rock combos to play in their kids' parties. It was the leadership who brought back LPs from abroad. . . . They were the ones who traveled, and their kids asked them to bring back music of the Rolling Stones, Beatles, Bee Gees. The children in turn lent the discs to friends who copied them onto cassettes, and thus everyone could listen to the groups via a sort of musical underground. When they walked in the street with the records they'd sometimes put them in [a] slipcover of a record by Beethoven or Benny Moré. (Acosta 1996, interview)

One can hear the influence of 1960s rock and folk rock in a majority of *nueva trova* from that period. Nicola's "Para una imaginaria María del Carmen" strikes the listener as more reminiscent of Phil Ochs than of any Cuban mu-

sical antecedent, while Silvio Rodríguez's "Oleo de mujer con sombrero" takes its picking style directly from Bob Dylan's "Boots of Spanish Leather."⁶ Rodríguez, more than any other early figure, championed the fusion of foreign musical elements, primarily from the United States and Britain, into Cuban popular song.

Since *nueva trova* performers blend styles, many of the best-known pieces don't sound overtly Cuban but instead strike the listener as cosmopolitan and eclectic. One might describe *trovadores* as the "culture brokers" of international music trends (Robbins 1990:435), strongly influenced by foreign pop and yet invariably changing and personalizing it for local audiences. Listeners unfamiliar with these performers who would like to experience the musical eclecticism of *nueva trova* need only contrast the following pieces: Silvio Rodríguez's "Unicornio," a slow, lyrical ballad that uses the image of a blue unicorn as a metaphor for fantasy, nostalgia, and desire; satirical political commentary by Alejandro "Virulo" García set to recycled fragments of international repertoire such as rococo-style harpsichord, the Mexican folk song "Cielito lindo," and "The Charleston"; and guitar pieces by Pablo Milanés such as "Son de Cuba a Puerto Rico," based on transformations of rhythms associated with Cuban dance music.⁷ In the latter, Milanés's syncopated picking style imitates the anticipated bass of the *son* as well as its accompanying *tres* melodies (Ex. 6).

Lyrics are a central feature of *nueva trova*, but the lyrical themes with which it is associated are nearly as difficult to generalize about as its musical style. Some artists have been strongly influenced by internationally recognized poets (José Martí, Nicolás Guillén, César Vallejo, Pablo Neruda) to the point of imitating their work or setting their poems to music (Acosta and Gómez 1981:12).⁸ Most typical, however, is the use of fairly simple and direct original verse. Writers tend to avoid machismo and the objectification of women as well as stereotypically romantic imagery, though love remains a prominent subject (Manuel 1987:174). Many works are political, contemplating the valor of insurgents at Moncada or paying homage to activists of past decades.⁹ Others are entirely tender and personal, while in yet others one finds a powerful linking of public and private spheres. Examples of the latter include Silvio Rodríguez's "Aurora, Clara y Felicia," a love song dedicated to three women, one fighting in the Angolan civil war, or Carlos Varela's "Foto de familia," which ponders empty spaces at the dinner table representing loved ones separated through political exile.

Perhaps due to the heterogeneity of *nueva trova* and the degree to which its sound varies from one artist to the next, it has been defined less in musical terms and more by the generation that created it and its meanings.

Acosta and Gómez (1981:6) define *nueva trova* as “a phenomenon that arose among the youngest generation . . . a deliberate rupture with music that had come before, a certain ‘return to the roots’ combined with the scent of renovation, and finally . . . the adoption of social and political consciousness.”¹⁰ Danilo Orozco characterizes *nueva trova* as “a creative attitude, a manner of approaching song composition, an aesthetic sense, a sum of dissatisfactions [*inquietudes*]” (Hernández 2002:64).

Others place more emphasis on opposition, defining the movement as a “culture of contestation” among the young and disenfranchised (Faya 1995:389). The elements of innovation and contestation were both a self-conscious part of most participants’ music. Players strove from the outset to create a different sort of art, to challenge the past musically and textually, to interpret and express the revolutionary experience in personal terms of their own choosing (Benmayor 1981:13). The entire lifestyle and persona of the protest singer represented a testing of boundaries. By growing long hair, wearing torn “hippie” clothing, performing on sidewalks or other nonstandard venues, and participating in other forms of nonconformity in addition to song writing, artists implicitly challenged social and artistic norms on multiple fronts.

THE FIRST ARTISTS

The generation associated with the emergence of *nueva trova* were in grade school when the revolution came to power. They were the first to be educated in a country attempting to radically alter the consciousness of its citizens. In addition to reading the works of Marx and Engels, these children debated questions of social justice from an early age. They were products of the drive to create an *hombre nuevo*, or idealized “new socialist citizen.” *Granma*, the state newspaper, defined the new citizen as an individual with “a profound consciousness of his role in society and of his duties and social responsibilities, a [person] capable of constructing Communism and living with it” (Fagen 1969:17). Visitors to Cuba such as Ernesto Cardenal have noted the profound effects of such education on the young. My own experiences confirm that, regardless of their ultimate acceptance or rejection of socialism, most Cubans have been forced to confront a range of issues and have a much higher degree of political awareness than their counterparts in countries such as the United States.

In addition to domestic educational changes, international social trends of the 1960s heavily affected protest artists. Along with others in Europe

and the United States, the musicians questioned established patterns of sexual behavior, dress, and social relationships. They were truly products of the revolution—most assisted in voluntary community service projects, joined the newly formed Asociación de Jóvenes Rebeldes (Association of Revolutionary Youth) as teenagers, completed military service after 1964—and yet didn't hesitate to raise their voices in criticism when necessary. They considered themselves patriotic and rebellious at the same time, ready to defend Cuba despite the fact that it might not always give them reason to feel proud. Perhaps because of this independent attitude, the first individuals who began singing protest songs in public were referred to disparagingly by PCC members as *los conflictivos*, "the troublemakers" (Rodríguez 1996:10).¹¹

Most of the early *trovadores* were men, but several women such as Sara González (b. 1951) and Marta Campos also had a significant impact in the 1970s. Composer Teresita Fernández (b. 1930), though of an earlier generation, also deserves recognition as a seminal figure. She participated in the International Festival of Song with Silvio Rodríguez in 1967 and organized various *peñas* (informal artistic gatherings) as a means of encouraging younger artists to compose and play. Her Sunday afternoon gatherings in Lenin Park, probably her most famous *peña*, began in 1974 and continued for seventeen years. A surprising number of *trovadores* have recorded songs by Fernández, including Rodríguez himself, Noel Nicola, Miriam Ramos, Heidy Igualeda, and Jorge García (Elizundia Ramírez 2001:58, 67, 94).

For many aspiring performers, the educational opportunities afforded them as part of the Amateurs movement proved important to the improvement of their musicianship and their contacts with peers. *Trovadores* Tony Pinelli, Jesús del Valle, and Carlos Mas emphasize the importance of these classes as providing a venue for the performance and critical evaluation of their work (Díaz Pérez 1994:168). Miriam Ramos (b. 1946) also studied music as an amateur in the early 1960s (Orovio 1981:320) before beginning to sing in the National Chorus. Amateur talent festivals hosted by the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) represented another early performance opportunity for *trovadores*, one of the only public spaces available before they received government sponsorship. The informal nature of musical training among *trova* singers is significant, since it is one factor that made their music difficult for the cultural establishment to accept (Acosta 1995b: 375).

Because they had such a tremendous impact on the early years of the movement and continue to make a mark as composers today, some mention should be made of Pablo Milanés and Silvio Rodríguez. Their musical interests are distinct and complementary, underscoring the individualistic nature of *nueva trova*. Similarly, their careers, which have been more thor-



FIGURE 13. A very young-looking Pablo Milanés taking part in inaugural events of the sixth Festival de la Trova, March 1969. Photo Archive, Ministry of Culture, Cuba.

oughly documented than most, demonstrate the changing relationship between artists and the government.

Pablo Milanés, a *mulato* (light-skinned Afro-Cuban) performer, was born in 1943 in Bayamo in eastern Cuba. His first musical experiences involved playing *son* and *vieja trova*; many of his compositions have been strongly grounded in Cuban folklore, and he has consistently promoted the work of traditional entertainers.¹² As a teenager in the 1950s, Milanés was already singing on Cuban television with José Antonio Méndez and Marta Valdés (Acosta and Gómez 1981:10). He later performed in Havana dance orchestras, in the Cuarteto del Rey (a group dedicated to interpreting North Amer-

ican spirituals), and in the jazz vocal group Los Bucaneros, directed by Rober-tico Marín (D'Rivera 1998:119). Milanés's early solo repertoire is noteworthy for its engaging lyrical quality, the influence of jazz harmonies, his adap-tation of folkloric rhythms into unique fingerpicking patterns on the guitar, and his straightforward but engaging lyrics discussing intimate relationships, love of country, and political matters. More than any other figure, Milanés is credited with bridging the generational divides that separate *nueva trova* from popular song of the 1950s (Acosta 1995b: 378). He wrote the first piece recognized as *nueva trova* by historians, "Mis 22 años," in 1965 (Fig. 13).

If Pablo Milanés is an innovative traditionalist, extending and adapting local genres, Silvio Rodríguez (b. 1946) might be described as an interna-tionalist, patterning his early musical style loosely on songs by Bob Dylan and Paul McCartney. Rodríguez, a Hispanic Cuban, was born in San Anto-nio de los Baños on the outskirts of Havana. Prior to 1959, he had no profes-sional performance experience. During his formative teenage years he volun-teered as a teacher in literacy campaigns, in military service, and in other revolutionary activities. He too performs principally on the guitar but more often strums in a folk-rock style. His music is harmonically complex but is also noteworthy for its asymmetrical phrases, abrupt key changes, and high vocals. The lyrics of Rodríguez's songs are especially daring, in-corporating surrealist imagery and powerful extended metaphors so that the literal meaning of the text is far from transparent. Indeed, many consider him to be a poet first and a musician second. Rodríguez began composing about 1967 and quickly developed a following. He was the first to achieve national recognition in 1968 and remains *nueva trova's* most internation-ally renowned artist (Fig. 14).

While not absolute, there are distinctions between the admirers of Sil-vio Rodríguez and Pablo Milanés. Silvio's fans tend more often to be white, college-educated, and cosmopolitan, preferring rock and international pop music to the music of traditional Cuban performers. One gets the impres-sion that some subtly associate Cuban dance music and other genres with poorly educated blacks and thus consider them less interesting (Robbins 1990:440). Pablo's fans, by contrast, are more consistently black or racially mixed and are more sympathetic to domestic music of all kinds. The racial-ized associations of each singer are perhaps clearest when one considers the performers that they have chosen to associate with. Silvio Rodríguez is best known for having given Hispanic Cuban rockers Carlos Varela and Santi-ago Feliú their first opportunities to perform and record, while Pablo Mi-lanés chose to promote Afro-Cubans Gerardo Alfonso, Alberto Tosca, Xiomara Laugart, and Marta Campos and the folk drumming ensemble



FIGURE 14. Silvio Rodríguez performing in the Festival Internacional de la Canción, Varadero, 1982. Photo Archive, Ministry of Culture, Cuba.

Yoruba An-dabo (Alexis Esquivel, pers. comm.). Likewise, Silvio established close professional ties with white Brazilian Chico Buarque in the mid-1970s, while Pablo collaborated with Afro-Brazilian Milton Nascimento (Leonardo Acosta, pers. comm.).

EARLY PROTEST SONG

Singer Noel Nicola noted in 1971 that the deeds of socialist leaders implicitly exhort Cubans to rebellious acts, but that they have tended to be intol-

erant of rebellion in others (Cardenal 1974:51). The government has consistently supported progressive positions in terms of its social agenda but has proven conservative in its attitudes toward long hair (worn by men), homosexuality, religious expression, and other personal liberties. This was especially true in the late 1960s, as *nueva trova* protagonists found to their dismay. They gathered informally whenever they could (Coppelia, the Parque de los Cabezones at the university, the breakwater along the *malecón*) and shared songs that expressed a new vision of what Cubans should think about and strive toward. Ironically, their questions about the nature and substance of socialism came at a time when similar debates were occurring at the highest levels of government, debates that would result in the suppression of *nueva trova* for a time.

Supporters and critics of the Cuban Revolution alike recognize the late 1960s as a period of conflict. Díaz Pérez (1994:157) uses the metaphor of an enormous forge to convey a sense of how opposing goals and viewpoints were being fused into a unified political consensus, often at the expense of those unwilling to conform. Medin (1990:16) describes the country as moving toward “a new, Soviet-oriented phase of orthodoxy,” implementing programs that extended Marxist principles more deeply into the social fabric. Such trends resulted in a more intrusive government presence than had existed previously. The change was most apparent in the area of economics. Beginning with the *ofensiva revolucionaria*, the government outlawed private business activity down to the fruit carts of street vendors and manicures offered by individual women in their homes. The extent of such centralization made many uncomfortable and resulted in new waves of exiles.

Along with this drive toward economic purism came an ideological movement, one that demonstrated less tolerance toward those unwilling to accept PCC doctrine. Increasingly, space for diversity of opinion about what Cuban socialism should be was replaced by a demand for uncompromising adherence to a single position. Most policy makers at that time could not conceive of promoting youth protest music as part of their political agenda. In a country that was striving to create a utopia for all citizens and that had the concerns of the masses constantly in mind, music of protest seemed inappropriate, even seditious. Just as leaders decided there was no need for complete intellectual freedom if it endangered socialist goals, “so there was no need . . . for protest songs within the revolution” (Medin 1990:126).

Fortunately for the *trovadores*, some leaders retained the will and the political clout to define revolutionary expression on their own terms. One

such person was Haydée Santamaría, a survivor of the Moncada garrison attack led by Castro in 1953 who directed cultural activities in the Casa de las Américas (Americas House). A music lover and admirer of South American protest song, Santamaría created an early haven for *nueva trova*. She made efforts to expose younger performers to socially conscious repertoire from abroad and invited foreigners to Havana for events such as the Encuentro Internacional de la Canción Protesta (July 1967) and the Festival de la Canción Popular in Varadero (December 1967; de Juan 1982:51). These included guests from the United States, such as Barbara Dane, as well as others from Latin America and Europe. In 1968, Santamaría scheduled presentations of protest song at the Casa de las Américas on the first Tuesday of every month, many of which were televised. Only an individual with the impeccable revolutionary credentials of Santamaría could have done so at that time.¹³ Featured performers in addition to Pablo and Silvio included Noel Nicola, Alfredo Martínez, Maité Abreu, and Ramón Díaz. Established *filin* artists Elena Burke, Omara Portuondo, and Maggie Prior also participated (Orejuela Martínez 2004:244).

In the first months of 1968, planners at one of Cuba's two national television stations authorized a half-hour show on Sunday evenings called *Mientras tanto* (In the Meantime) that featured Silvio Rodríguez and others. The title of the show was taken from a Rodríguez composition that served as its theme song. Younger artists mixed with more established figures such as Burke, Portuondo, and poet Guillermo Rodríguez Rivera. Even so, the program proved controversial at the Instituto Cubano de Radio y Televisión (ICRT) because of its inclusion of "hippies."¹⁴ By mid-April, Director Jorge Serguera decided to cancel *Mientras tanto* (Correa 1997; Díaz Pérez 1994:134–37).¹⁵ He had never liked the idea of featuring protest singers but felt pressured to give the Cuban youth a program that would appeal to them. This was especially urgent since broadcasts of U.S. and European rock groups had ended (Fernández Pavón 1999, interview). A few radio presentations of *trovadores* aired on Radio Habana Cuba at approximately the same time organized by Estela Bravo, and in 1968 the Casa de las Américas recorded at least one limited edition LP anthology of protest songs (Díaz Pérez 1994:164–67).

CONFLICTS WITH AUTHORITIES

Y así tengo enemigos que me quieren descarrilar,
haciéndome la guerra porque me puse a cantar.
Pero pongo la historia por encima de su razón

y sé con qué canciones quiero hacer Revolución,
aunque me quede sin voz,
aunque no me vengan a escuchar . . .

I have enemies that want to derail me,
at war with me because I began to sing.
But history is superior to their truths,
And I know the songs I want to make Revolution with,
even if I lose my voice,
even if they don't come to listen . . .

CARLOS VARELA, "Jalisco Park"

The reasons for the onset of the revolution's harshest period of ideological repression, what Ambrosio Fornet labeled *el quinquenio gris*, have yet to be fully explored. Beginning in 1968 and continuing through the early 1970s, as mentioned, Cuban artists and intellectuals experienced serious professional difficulties. Most who were active at that time tell horror stories involving public condemnation of their work, blacklisting, time served in jail or in "voluntary" labor camps (*granjas de castigo*, literally "punishment farms"),¹⁶ and the like. Clearly, the so-called gray period represents the worst of the Cuban Revolution in terms of limitations on expression. It is characterized by excessive authoritarianism, "a deformity of official thought that rendered impossible everything from the free circulation of ideas to the legitimate right to make a mistake" (Alberto 1996:34; Dumont 1970:81).¹⁷

It is possible that economic difficulties and increasing reliance on Soviet aid contributed to these changes. Domínguez (1978:153–59) notes that the final years of the 1960s saw Cuba's GNP plunge to its lowest levels since the revolution had come to power. The economy hit its absolute low in 1970 during an unsuccessful attempt to produce ten million tons of sugar in a single harvest. Soviet aid arrived to make up much of the difference, but at the price of greater centralization of labor and an imposed reorganization of the government under foreign guidance. The Chinese Cultural Revolution, which reached a peak of intensity in 1966 and 1967, may have influenced Cuban leaders as well. "Red guard" youth organizations ascribed to fundamentalist interpretations of Marxism that rejected many forms of activity as bourgeois. Their belligerent actions against intellectuals and artists included jail sentences, beatings, and public humiliation of perceived counterrevolutionaries (Hinton 2003). Finally, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 also had ideological repercussions internationally. Major tensions surfaced in the PCC over whether to publicly condemn this act.

Ambivalent himself, Castro eventually chose to endorse the invasion in order to keep receiving economic aid. Among figures in the Central Committee who had spoken out against the invasion, forty-three were arrested, nine were expelled from the party, and twenty-six were imprisoned before the year ended (Domínguez 1978:162).

Though the leadership of the late 1960s remained concerned about counterrevolutionary activities on the part of the CIA and Cuban exiles, they came to view military invasion of the island a less likely option as time went on.¹⁸ In place of this concern, they instead focused on culture and the media as the most central sites of future conflict with the capitalist world. As a result, they began to condemn music associated with the United States and Western Europe as corrupted or contaminated (Arias 1982:28); this is the period that witnessed the censorship of most rock and jazz. In a speech from 1980, Castro verbalized attitudes toward foreign influences that had circulated in party documents for over a decade. His primary point was that Cuban culture had been “deformed” as the result of external meddling.

The profound deformation . . . at which imperialists have worked for [some time], using a corrupt press, radio, and television networks that they often manage to make serve their interests, the films they introduced here, the habits, customs, prejudices, etc. with which they infected our country: all this could not but create difficulties. . . . We know, for example, that years after the triumph of '59, after the victory at [the Bay of Pigs], in Cuba we still had to set ourselves the urgent goal of struggling against cultural colonialism, which survived the defeat of political colonialism and economic colonialism. . . . It is a long struggle and we are still engaged in it. (As quoted in Medin 1990:17)

The ideological initiatives of the late 1960s affected every sphere of cultural activity, but officials paid special attention to rock music, given its centrality to youth culture. Rock-influenced songs were viewed as implicitly subversive on many levels: because of their associations with the “decadent” ways of the United States and other capitalist countries, because of their English lyrics, and because of their association with alternative dress and lifestyles that did not conform to established norms. Officials viewed rock as transcending sound and embodying an entire way of life that often resulted in an unwillingness to integrate into the revolutionary process (Sosa 1996, interview). To the leadership, the implicit aesthetic of all rock, with its emphasis on transgression, physical gratification and liberation, excess, and pleasure, ran contrary to the development of a disciplined and self-sacrificing socialist mentality. From their perspective, truly revolutionary

artists should not adopt any of the physical trappings of a *rockero* or use rock music, even as a vehicle in support of socialism. Any affiliation with it implied *desviaciones ideológicas*, ideological drift.

By the late 1960s, a climate of fear permeated the intellectual community, young and old. Limitations on the exchange of ideas first surfaced during the Congreso Cultural de La Habana in January of 1968 and were most apparent in discourses surrounding the Congreso de Educación y Cultura in 1971 (Alberto 1996:33). Artists found that in many instances they could no longer voice their true opinions; as a result, they began avoiding controversial issues in an attempt to protect themselves. Media officials scrutinized song lyrics from this period and altered many of them or banned the pieces outright. Paquito D’Rivera (1998:121) recounts a conversation with Pablo Milanés in which the composer said, “Damn it, every time that I come up with a new song, [radio and television administrator] Papito [Serguera] has to listen to it first along with the folks on the commission of revolutionary ethics. The Party makes me change pieces of the text if they believe this or that section might be misinterpreted. . . . No, no, to hell with Papito and his television station!”

The internment of Cuban youth judged unsupportive of the country’s socialist agenda occurred on a massive scale in the late 1960s and early 1970s. No reliable statistics exist, but one interviewee told Ernesto Cardenal that hundreds of thousands had been detained at least briefly as of February 1970: “Young men who fled from military service or school, or who have been brought there for other reasons, hippies, long-haired ones, malcontents . . . they are in rehabilitation farms or camps” (Cardenal 1974:50). This astounding figure has been supported by some of my interviews with Cuban exiles; poet and composer Reynaldo Fernández Pavón, for instance, estimates that about one-third of the adult male population spent at least brief periods in detention at this time. Sentences included manual labor in the countryside, prison, or assignment to “reeducation” sessions. Yet another potential destination were the *minas del frío* (literally mines of cold) area, a region in the Sierra Maestra. Many nonconformists served time there, including Pablo Labañino Merino, the painter who designed the covers of several early *nueva trova* albums. The year 1969 marked the peak of police activity of this sort, probably because of concern over the outcome of the mammoth sugar harvest (Sosa 1996, interview).

Because of the suspect image of protest singers, they experienced frequent difficulties. Pablo Milanés, one of the first to be jailed, suffered an especially harsh sentence. The circumstances leading to his arrest remain unclear and may have been unrelated to his song writing. In approximately 1966, offi-

cialists accused him of being a homosexual and sentenced him to a UMAP (Unidades Militares para la Ayuda a la Producción) prison in Camagüey, where he remained for over a year (Giro 1996, interview; Golendorf 1977:48).¹⁹ Thankfully, Milanés's confinement was cut short as a result of the growing popularity of songs such as "Para vivir," "Ya ves," and "Mis 22 años." Elena Burke and Omara Portuondo recorded and promoted these pieces and others by the composer in the mid-1960s. Burke is said to have sung them for visiting intellectuals at the Casa de las Américas; their enthusiasm for the music and repeated demands to meet the composer eventually facilitated Milanés's release (Fernández Pavón, March 18, 1998, interview).

Other musicians experienced similar difficulties. Documentation is scanty and, to the extent it is available, tends to focus only on the best-known figures. The case of Silvio Rodríguez may be typical. He is known to have had minor clashes with the police and administrators such as Jorge Serguera beginning in 1967. According to one source, he dedicated the piece "Te doy una canción" to a girlfriend who was the daughter of a prominent military leader. The girl's father did not approve of Rodríguez and eventually took it upon himself to impede his career (Sosa 1996, interview). Rodríguez exacerbated such problems with his combative nature: getting a tattoo, wearing hippie clothing, and making statements about the importance of foreign rock on his musical development. The police detained him on various occasions in the late 1960s, and at least once sent him to the countryside with other youths to an *encampamiento* where they lectured him on the importance of fuller integration into the revolution (Orovio 1996, interview). Intervention by Haydée Santamaría invariably led to his release before long, however.

The low point in Silvio Rodríguez's career came in 1969 when he was fired by the ICRT and had no options for artistic employment. At this point the composer accepted a job working on a fishing boat named after the Playa Girón, site of the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. His voyage on this ninety-four-meter craft with one hundred other young men began in September of 1969 and lasted through January of 1970 (Rodríguez 1996:9). Contemporaries viewed the trip as a form of punishment, a decision not made of Rodríguez's own free will; many thought he would never regain prominence as an artist. Rodríguez himself notes that during the year or two prior to leaving on the boat the "thread" on which his professional existence hung "had become dangerously tense" (Rodríguez 1996:12). He describes the individuals who fired him from the ICRT as "bosses who said one thing and did another, squares, those who didn't trust the young, guys with all the perks, enemies of culture, the establishment, cowards who were ruining the

revolution that I carried inside of me" (Rodríguez 1996:12). Surprisingly, the months aboard the *Playa Girón* proved incredibly productive for Silvio from a musical standpoint. He wrote many of his most beautiful and internationally renowned compositions, including several that openly challenge the government, at sea.²⁰

Conditions began to improve dramatically for younger musicians beginning only a few years later, and yet more subtle problems persisted. Radio programmers allowed them only limited access to the mass media for many years. Representatives of the CNC continued to closely monitor the ideological content of their song lyrics. They occasionally prohibited controversial pieces from being recorded and sent police to concerts to ensure that they were not performed live (Oppenheimer 1992:265). Even today, those with a history of oppositional compositions may find their careers thwarted. The PCC continues to determine on occasion that some performers should not appear on the radio or television despite their popularity.²¹

It should be clear by now that what came eventually to be called the *nueva trova* movement gained popularity in the 1960s not because of government policy but in spite of it. In fact, performers had to fight against a cultural bureaucracy in order to be heard at all. Castro himself nearly admitted as much in remarks made in the mid-1970s: "Did we, the politicians, conceive of [the *nueva trova*] movement? Did we plan it? No! These things arise, like so many others, that none of us can even imagine" (Díaz Pérez 1994:131). The eventual prominence of Vicente Feliú, Sara González, Noel Nicola, Pablo Milanés, and Silvio Rodríguez and the nationwide promotion of younger artists were due to a conscious and abrupt shift in policy. In the space of only a few years, *nueva trova* moved from the margin to the mainstream of socialist music making. The state heralded its proponents as spokespersons of the revolutionary experience rather than berating them as insolent malcontents.

THE MNT AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION

The first government organization that employed *trovadores* and allowed them to produce music as professionals was the ICAIC cinema institute. Under the direction of classically trained composer Leo Brouwer, the ICAIC established a working group of young musicians with the intention of training them and letting them create film scores. The members, known collectively as the Grupo de Experimentación Sonora (GES), or Sonic Experimentation Group, first assembled in 1969; they continued working with

various changes of personnel through 1978. Musicians involved at some point in the GES during these years include singer-songwriters Pablo Milanés, Noel Nicola, Silvio Rodríguez, and Sara González, saxophonist Leonardo Acosta, bassist Eduardo Ramos, guitarists Pablo Menéndez and Sergio Vitier, and percussionist Leo Pimentel (Orovio 1981:137). Under Brouwer's guidance, a number of the performers learned to read music for the first time, were exposed to the fundamentals of harmony and counterpoint, and developed the ability to work collectively as well as individually.²²

The formation of the GES did not imply broad acceptance of *nueva trova* on the part of the establishment but rather a truce or compromise with younger performers. It offered them a creative outlet, but not entirely on their own terms. Silvio Rodríguez notes that Alfredo Guevara, the founder of the ICAIC, pushed through the idea of the group's formation mainly as an excuse to offer a few of the many disenfranchised *trovadores* a job (Rodríguez 1996:11). Much of the music the ICAIC asked them to produce was instrumental, quite distinct from the songs they had initially composed. Perhaps the most important result of the GES was that it legitimized the status of *trovadores* and supported their creative activities over a sustained period. As professional film scorers, they were more respectable and still had time to compose songs of their own choosing. The recordings they made at the ICAIC (e.g., Brouwer n.d.), while hailed in certain artistic circles and sparking a degree of interest elsewhere in Latin America, never received much local popular recognition. The group eventually disbanded as the result of problems such as lack of technical equipment, low salaries, and aesthetic differences among members. Leo Brouwer also devoted less time to the GES in later years, pursuing his own career as a conductor and composer (Acosta 2002:147).

The government's desire for closer political relations with the Allende administration in Chile and that of other Latin American countries undoubtedly contributed to the growing acceptance of *nueva trova*. Protest music gained widespread recognition in Chile half a dozen years earlier than in Cuba and was already an organized political force by 1969 (Morris 1986:121). Cuban singers had firsthand exposure to their counterparts in South America because the CNC began sponsoring pan-Latin American song festivals in Havana as early as 1965 (Díaz Pérez 1994:85).²³ By 1971, Víctor Jara himself came to perform in the Casa de las Américas; others visiting shortly thereafter included Daniel Viglietti, Isabel and Angel Parra, Tania Libertad, and the group Inti Illimani (Díaz Ayala 1981:310; Díaz Pérez 1994:229). In the same year, the First National Congress on Education and Culture called explicitly for the study of "the cultural values of

our fraternal Latin American countries" (Orejuela Martínez 2004:269). Members of the Cuban group Manguaré, created through the direct sponsorship of the CNC and the UJC, received an invitation to fly to Chile and study Andean folklore (Benmayor 1981:23), becoming the first of several ensembles to do so.

The early 1970s represents a pivotal period in official reevaluation of protest song. With ever-greater frequency, state cultural institutions invited *trovadores* to take part in international festivals throughout Latin America, Spain, and Soviet Bloc countries and to play in more prominent settings domestically. Policy makers must have recognized the widespread appeal of the music and the fact that similar traditions now existed in numerous countries. They may still have found the protest singer persona and the foreign musical elements in many songs unpleasant but chose not to criticize. *Trova* had proven an effective tool in public relations and was certainly less controversial than the electrified rock bands that many listened to clandestinely on late-night Miami broadcasts. Gradually, songwriters found they had more opportunities to make recordings. Initially asked to play in relatively low-profile contexts—grade schools, factories, neighborhood theaters, parks—they soon moved to more prominent settings. In a short time, pieces by Silvio Rodríguez and others that had been considered counterrevolutionary had become the unofficial anthems of the country.

The peak years of *nueva trova*'s popularity, as well as that of protest song in many other Latin American countries, extend from 1973 through approximately 1985. During that time, it became the principal form of music targeted at younger domestic audiences and was often featured in annual festivals (Benmayor 1981:22). It should be remembered that the term "*nueva trova*" itself achieved widespread recognition only in the mid-1970s (Nicola [1975] 1995:365). The very label can be viewed as a move by authorities to link what many considered a suspect form of expression to artists and genres of the past, and in this way to take away some of its oppositionality. Calling rockers such as Vicente and Santiago Feliú *trovadores* linked them discursively to Sindo Garay and Alberto Villalón, performers whose compositions had never been controversial. It obscured the fact that their *trova* actually represented a form of counterculture heavily influenced from abroad.

In November 1972, *nueva trova* became part of an official movement across the country, inaugurated by performance events in Manzanillo (Orejuela Martínez 2004:278). By 1973, the *Nueva Trova* movement (MNT) had a national registry of members, a board of directors, centers for performance in every province, and annual festivals. This provided additional support to

artists, though it also meant that they were required to audition and receive approval before being recognized as bona fide members.²⁴ The number of professional, salaried groups increased dramatically, and new names rose to prominence: Alfredo Carol in Sancti Spiritus; Lázaro García in Villa Clara; Alejandro García (“Virulo”) and Miriam Ramos in Havana; Freddy Laborí (“Chispa”) and Augusto Blanca in Oriente; the groups Canto Libre (based in Camagüey), Manguaré, Mayohuacán, Moncada, Nuestra América (Matanzas); and others. The first widely disseminated *nueva trova* LP, Silvio Rodríguez’s *Días y flores*, appeared in 1975. Young acoustic players reappeared on television in 1978 as part of the show *Te doy una canción*, where they remained for many years.²⁵ Groups performing electrified rock began to appear as guests about 1982 (Acosta 1996, interview), though it took longer for that style to be fully accepted. In general, the drive to institutionalize what had been such an eclectic and personal phenomenon proved difficult. In the first years after the National Congress on Education and Culture, MNT officials made attempts to dictate the content of *nueva trova* composition, with disappointing results (Díaz Pérez 1994:22). They also continued to suppress songs deemed inappropriate, such as Pablo Milanés’s “La vida no vale nada” (Life Is Worth Nothing).²⁶

In a musical sense, the institutionalization of *nueva trova* offered more resources to performers than had been available previously. The government gave them access to recording studios and producers and facilitated the dissemination of their work. One begins to find more elaborated compositions on the market in the mid-1970s as a result; solo guitar pieces are still heard but contrast with others incorporating synthesizer, electronic special effects, instruments such as the piano or violin, formally scored arrangements for larger groups, collaborative recordings featuring other national and international performers and their ensembles, and so forth. Changes in *nueva trova* recordings may reflect the increased musical training and expanded aesthetic horizons of artists as they became professional entertainers. It may also represent the bias of a classically oriented musical establishment trying to make the repertoire sound more “sophisticated.”

Lyrically, *nueva trova* repertoire began to change as well. During the 1960s, *trovadores* freely wrote about virtually any subject. Because they had little access to the media, they performed largely among themselves; their compositions never represented a significant threat. After 1972, this began to change. Musicians found themselves in the spotlight, invited to receptions by the president of the UNEAC, greeted personally by members of the Central Committee and even Castro himself as they returned home from tours,²⁷ and written about extensively in the media. Suddenly all of their

actions, musical and otherwise, were subject to scrutiny. They could only critique domestic politics at the risk of losing the supportive relationship that now existed between themselves and the Ministry of Culture.

Trovadores thus walked an ever more delicate line between fidelity to a government that now supported them and fidelity to themselves and their own points of view. Songs about housing shortages in the city or references to censorship and restrictions on artistic freedom, for instance, become less common and were replaced by other themes: references to figures from Cuba's long anti-imperialist struggles; nationalism; international politics; or personal relationships.²⁸ Pablo Milanés wrote "Amo esta isla" in 1980 in response to the Mariel crisis, as one example. It represented a call to stay on the island and support the revolution (González Portal 2003). The case of Silvio Rodríguez's later works is more difficult to evaluate since his texts are so highly metaphorical. One might suggest that it is their very ambiguity that has enabled much of his music to avoid criticism from the state while still being read as subversive by fans.

Journalist Cristóbal Sosa suggests that the political pressures facing performers as of the mid-1970s are similar to those facing all artists and intellectuals in Cuba. Cultural figures must belong to state organizations. These affiliations facilitate one's career in many respects but also elicit and prohibit certain kinds of activity.

Here there's a music institute and one must be in agreement with that institute to accomplish many things. Then there's the UNEAC, which also has its regulations. You belong to the UNEAC, fine, but you can't do anything you'd like such as adopting independent positions that cross [those of the PCC]. When there's an important cultural event that is judged to be contrary to the interests of the Revolution, a call goes out in the UNEAC so that all the intellectuals come together and sign declarations against it, as happened in the case of the Helms-Burton legislation. (Sosa 2001, interview)²⁹

Without necessarily intending to, Milanés and Rodríguez have become *nueva trova* superstars who generate tremendous sympathy for socialist Cuba. In recognition of their contributions (and, undoubtedly, in order to make sure they won't defect), the government permits them to purchase large houses; provides them with domestic help, cars, and chauffeurs; provides access to foreign currency, free license to travel abroad, the right to establish their own artistic foundations; and other perks—all of this in a country in which many families still live on inadequate rations of rice and beans and can't afford to buy enough hand soap. By Cuban standards, these

singers have, ironically, become bourgeois. Both Pablo and Silvio are masterful artists and deserve special financial recognition, but their new status compromises their ability to act as a “voice of protest.” Even analysts on the island admit that their lives now are completely divorced from the day-to-day realities of the average person (Díaz Pérez 1996, interview). To the extent that songs by Silvio and others since the 1990s address pressing social issues (e.g., prostitution, crime), they tend to be marketed for foreign audiences, receiving little airplay within Cuba.³⁰

PASSING THE MANTLE OF PROTEST

By the mid-1980s, the music of first-generation *nueva trova* singers had become less attractive to younger listeners. Only a few of them continued playing regularly for local audiences. Some found their talents inadequate compared with stars like Pablo or Silvio and gradually changed careers. Others opted to live abroad rather than at home. Virulo now performs in Mexico, Martín Rojas in Venezuela, Xiomara Laugart in New York, Donato Poveda in Miami (Acosta 1995b:21). Carlos Gómez and Admed Barroso Castellanos have left the country as well, the former a founding member of the MNT, the latter a former musician in Silvio Rodríguez’s backup band (Ojito 1987). Increasing support of commercial dance music, as well as of rock, and the resulting proliferation of new groups has also meant that more listening alternatives are available than in previous decades and more competition for those that remain.

For the most part, the declining appeal of *nueva trova* stems from the changing social meanings and functions of the repertoire. In the minds of those under twenty-five, middle-aged performers represent the establishment, not the voice of an outsider with a fresh perspective. Even more important, political change in Eastern Europe has resulted in widespread disillusionment with socialism, a cause with which *nueva trova* is now associated. Earlier songs inspired by the martyrs of Moncada ring hollow in an era of uncertainty about the future. In large part, the mantle of Alberto Faya’s “culture of contestation” has passed from early protest singers to a newer generation of *trovadores*, *rockeros*, and rap artists. Most receive far less recognition and occupy relatively marginal social positions, similar to those held by *trovadores* in the early 1970s.

A few older figures continue to write music with an edge. Pedro Luis Ferrer (b. 1952) represents one of the most well known; born in Las Villas province, he has gained a following both for his musicianship and his penchant

for insightful social critique. He also stands out for promoting the *guaracha* and *décima* poetry at a time when many consider traditional forms passé. Ferrer worked in various *nueva trova* groups in the 1970s but later formed his own band. The albums for which he first gained national popularity such as *Espuma y arena* date from that time. According to one Spanish journalist, Ferrer's recent music contrasts sharply with that of the "establishment trovador" (P.P. 1994:42). Denounced by some, the composer nevertheless considers himself a critical but supportive socialist and lampoons the Miami exile community in song and interviews as ruthlessly as he does politics in Havana.

Lyrics in Ferrer's music address a diversity of subjects and underscore the imposed limits on social commentary in mainstream *trova*. Whether joking or serious, he has voiced concern about religious intolerance, racism, homophobia, restraints on freedom of expression and travel, and the need for political reform. Listeners unfamiliar with Ferrer's work who are interested in an introduction to it might begin with "Mariposa" (Butterfly). The song was recorded in the United States by Latin jazz artist Claudia Acuña (2002) and also included in the soundtrack of the film *Before Night Falls* about the life of poet Reynaldo Arenas. The accompaniment to "Mariposa" is stark in the original version (Ferrer 1995), consisting only of acoustic guitar. Ferrer strums rather than picks in a relentless pattern emphasizing the and-of-two and -four in every 4/4 measure, imitating the anticipated bass of the *son*. Chords include dissonant pedals and minor sevenths and ninths; the ambiguous harmonies parallel Ferrer's polysemic and metaphorical lyrics. His emphasis on the top strings of the instrument and the lack of prominent bass tones nicely support the central imagery of a butterfly in flight. With masterful language, Ferrer tells a story in ten-line *décima* poetry that alludes simultaneously to erotic love, fantasy, aspiration, agony, and the search for freedom.

Mariposa, cual llorosa
 Canción que en tí se hace calma
 Vienes calmándome el alma
 Con tu volar, mariposa
 La libertad de una rosa
 Es vivir en la verdad
 Yo seguí felicidad
 En cada flor que te posas
 Me lo dijeron las rosas
 Eres tú su libertad
 Ay, mariposa
 Contigo el mundo se posa

En la verdad del amor
 Sé que en el mundo hay dolor
 Pero no es dolor el mundo.

Butterfly, just as a tearful song
 Grows calm in you
 You calm my soul
 With your flight, butterfly
 The freedom of a rose
 Is to live in truth
 I sought happiness
 In every flower you rested on
 The roses have told me
 You are their freedom
 Oh, butterfly
 With you the world alights
 On the truthfulness of love
 I know that there is pain in the world
 But the world is not pain.³¹

The metaphorical references in “Mariposa” to the quest for personal freedom have never generated much controversy in Cuba and are subject to a variety of interpretations. Two of Ferrer’s best-known compositions, however, “100% cubano” (100% Cuban) and “El abuelo Paco” (Grandfather Paco), are more directly critical of current realities. The first draws attention to special privileges afforded tourists and foreigners, emphasizing that Cubans themselves have frequently become second-class citizens in their own country. The second implicitly likens Castro to an irritable old man who builds his family a lovely house and then lords over them using implicit threats of violence. In both songs, Ferrer demonstrates his quick wit and biting sense of humor.

Ten paciencia con abuelo
 Recuerda bien cuanto hizo
 No contradigas su afán
 Pónle atención en su juicio
 Gasta un poco de tu tiempo
 Complaciendo su egoísmo
 No olvides que Abuelo tiene
 Un revólver y un cuchillo
 Y mientras no se lo quiten
 Abuelo ofrece peligro
 Aunque sepas que no, díle que sí
 Si lo contradices, peor para tí.

Be patient with grandpa
 Remember how much he's done
 Don't contradict his enthusiasm
 Pay attention to his views
 Spend a little time
 Flattering his ego

 Don't forget that gramps has
 A revolver and a knife
 And as long as they're not taken away
 He poses a threat

 Even if you know the answer is no, say yes
 If you contradict him, it will go badly for you.³²

Not surprisingly, the last time EGREM agreed to produce an album for Ferrer was over fifteen years ago, though they have re-released his early compositions on compact disc for the tourist market. Ferrer recorded "El abuelo Paco" independently in Miami with the help of his brother during a visit there and in a home studio in Havana. Authorities continue to limit diffusion of his more political songs and, at least in the 1990s, would not allow his concerts to be taped. Ferrer is aware of the price of nonconformity but has decided to speak his mind: "If you understand that no one has the right to administer liberty to you in the manner that the state bureaucracy in Cuba does, you have to resist and act like a free person to the extent that you can" (Ferrer in Niurka 1996).

Economic conditions have improved somewhat in recent years, but younger Cubans still have few attractive job opportunities, few possibilities for travel or study abroad, and limited access even to clothing, food, and domestic goods. The loss of support from the Soviet Union has created "a mass of educated youths whose expectations [clash] sharply with Cuba's desperate conditions" (Oppenheimer 1992:263). Dissatisfaction has led to an even stronger interest in foreign rather than national music. In the early 1990s, for example, Che Guevara's grandson Canek was known as a heavy metal rock fan whose favorite groups included Slayer, Death, and Kreator (Oppenheimer 1992:267). He and others have used rock as a symbolic tie to an international artistic community they feel separated from and as a reaction to government policies still considered too constraining.³³

Younger *trovadores* tend to play songs with an aesthetic identity distinct from that of earlier times. They recognize their debt to past repertoire but refer to their own music as *novísima trova* in order to underscore its unique qualities. Some members of the newer generation (Gerardo Alfonso, Heidy Iguálada, Lázara Ribadavia, Rita del Prado) rose to popularity playing acous-

tic guitar, but others have adopted electrified rock as their medium of choice, fuse elements of Cuban traditional repertoire with influences from abroad (jazz, Brazilian pop, rap), or some combination of both. Most *novísima trova* sounds even more modern and cosmopolitan than the music of earlier generations for this reason. Its artists tend to move with ease between styles from diverse locations and ethnic origins, including Afro-Cuban religious music and Hispanic *música guajira*. Since 1998, the Pablo de la Torriente Brau Cultural Center in Habana Vieja has become an important performance venue for *novísima trova*.

Carlos Varela stands out as one of the most articulate social commentators of recent years. Despite occasional clashes with bureaucrats, he has managed to negotiate a fairly stable position for himself as a critic who supports the socialist government even as he finds fault with it. As in the case of other rockers (Polito Ibáñez, Frank Delgado), Varela was unable to pursue his musical career through the existing education system. He eventually opted to study acting, forming an unofficial band while enrolled at the ISA in the mid-1980s. Involvement with the theater seems to have contributed to his musical success; Vilar (1998:17) notes that he was among the first to concern himself with lighting, stage effects, and other visual components of performance, a clear break with the tendency of older *trovadores* to appear in public as informally as possible. Early venues for Varela's band included live radio shows hosted by Ramón Fernández Larrea on Radio Ciudad de La Habana (Evora 2000).³⁴ Beginning about 1986, as mentioned, the state gradually began accepting rockers as musical professionals (Manduley López 1997:138). In this context and with the help of Silvio Rodríguez, Varela was eventually invited to play for larger audiences. The turning point in his career was a concert in the Karl Marx Theater in 1990 that converted him overnight into one of the most popular musicians of the day.³⁵ Despite this acclaim, he has never recorded within Cuba; his five studio albums, produced between 1988 and 1998, were all recorded in Spain or Venezuela.³⁶

Varela's work typifies that of *novísima trova* figures who have opted for an international pop/rock sound virtually indistinguishable from that of performers in the United States and Europe, in this case artists such as U2 or Sting. His pieces vary from sweet, lyrical ballads employing a lone keyboard or other instruments ("Memorias," "Bulevar," "Jalisco Park") to minimalist R&B grooves and half-spoken vocals reminiscent of Dire Straits ("La política no cabe en la azucarera") to raunchy, driving rock with heavy percussion and distorted electric guitar ("Soy un gnomo"). Example 7 demonstrates these tendencies. "Cuchilla en la acera" (whose lyrics are quoted be-

EXAMPLE 7. Excerpt from the opening of Carlos Varela's "Cuchilla en la acera" (Varela 1993a).

$\text{♩} = 92$
 Lepu-sie - ron la cu-chi-lla en el cue-llo Y después le qui-ta-ron la ro-pa
 B \flat min7 Eb7 Ab7sus4 B \flat min7
 Los tran-seún - tes que lo vie-ron vi - ra-ron la ca - ra Y se ca-lla-ron la bo-ca
 Eb7 Ab7sus4 B \flat min7 Eb7 Ab7sus4 B \flat min7

low) is a 1980s-style alternative rock piece harmonically similar to Randy Newman's "Short People." It opens at a slow tempo, but the voice and piano eventually accelerate and are joined by bass, electric guitar, and lively set drumming. In other songs, Varela incorporates occasional elements of more "Cuban-sounding" *timba* dance music (e.g., in "Tropicollage") to allude to issues related to tourism and commercialism.

Clearly a gifted musician, Varela nevertheless has gained widest recognition for his lyrics. They address domestic social concerns with a directness and bite that is striking. Examples include the text of "Guillermo Tell" (William Tell), written from the perspective of Tell's son, who is tired of being a target and asks his father to put the apple on his own head. The allegorical quality of the story is typical of Varela; in this case he alludes to generational conflicts between youth and older members of Cuba's power structure. Another example, "Cuchilla en la acera" (Razor on the Sidewalk), graphically describes violent street assaults typical of mid-1990s Havana:

Le pusieron la cuchilla en el cuello
 Y después le quitaron la ropa
 Los transeúntes que lo vieron viraron la cara
 Y se callaron la boca
 Y aunque no le encontraron dinero
 Lo dejaron tirado en la vía

Y a pesar de la sangre, los gritos, y Dios
Nunca llegó la policía.

They put the razor to his throat
And then they took all his clothing
The passers by that saw him turned their faces
And kept their mouths shut

And although they didn't find any money
They left him sprawled on the street
And despite the blood, the cries, and God
The police never arrived.

One well-known song, “Monedas al aire” (Coins in the Air), makes an impassioned call for political change. During the peak of Varela’s popularity, his concerts became associated with antiauthoritarianism to such an extent that they frequently ended in violence and intervention by the police (Vilar 1998:22–24).

To the extent that they perform traditional music, younger *trovadores* alter it substantially. The group Gema y Pável (named after principal members Gema Corredera and Pável Urkiza) is representative of this trend and is one of my personal favorites (Fig. 15). Their music is nearly as irreverent as that of Varela, but in a decidedly musical sense. Rather than foregrounding sociopolitical critique, their compositions instead redefine Cuban culture in more inclusive, hybridized terms. The style of the performers is highly individualistic. They eventually decided to leave Cuba, preferring to sing about past experiences while residing in Spain, as have a number of their contemporaries.

Gema and Pável began playing together in the late 1980s but had known each other since infancy. These were relatively good years in Cuba, a period of increasing possibilities for musicians. Neither artist had extensive formal training but were nurtured by an environment supportive of the arts.³⁷ Government-subsidized prices for food, housing, and other necessities meant that aspiring performers could dedicate long hours to creative work rather than seek full-time employment. Gema and Pável’s first shows took place in *peñas* hosted by composer Teresita Fernández in Miramar (Raúl Martínez, pers. comm.) and in those of Marta Valdés in Vedado (Valdés 2004). They also collaborated with actors, painters, and others in multimedia “happenings” held almost nightly in the Casa del Joven Creador (House of the Young Artist), an old warehouse near the Havana docks that the UJC converted into a recreational space. As their reputation grew, they appeared



FIGURE 15. Gema Corredera and Pável Urkiza performing a concert in the Arttime Theater in Miami on November 13, 2004. Since leaving Cuba, the duo has maintained a small but devoted public there and has also toured in Europe and Latin America in addition to the United States. Photo by Lili Domínguez. Courtesy of Pável Urkiza.

regularly at state-sponsored youth events until their departure for Spain in the early 1990s. Among the strongest musical influences on the duo are Brazilian artists (Djavan, Caetano Veloso, Ivan Lins) and North American jazz performers (Billie Holiday, Thelonious Monk, the Manhattan Transfer).

Songs by Pável Urkiza and others interpreted by this duo are amazingly diverse.³⁸ Rhythms may be slow and relaxed or consist of driving and syncopated figures taken from Afro-Cuban folklore (*son*, rumba, African-derived religious song). Arrangements vary from stark a cappella voices to highly elaborated studio productions with string ensemble or jazz combo back tracks. Accompaniment patterns on the guitar, the most common instrument, are highly original, employing percussive strumming, pedals, and non-standard inversions and chord sequences. Vertical harmonies tend to be extended, with unusual intervals emphasized between the voices of the singers: 5ths, flat 7ths, 9ths, and so forth. Vocal and instrumental improvisation is a prominent feature of most songs, as is African American-style melisma.

Gema and Pável's repertoire includes original work as well as compositions by fellow *trovadores*, adaptations of *vieja trova*, and arrangements of

EXAMPLE 8. Vocal excerpt from "Habana, devorando claridad" (Havana, Devouring Clarity) by Gema y Pável (1995).

Alto
No sé ni yo lo sé ni yo -

Tenor
Las ho-ras van na - cien - do, los por - ta-les guar-dan la hu-medad, los
no sé qué su - ce - de/en la ciu-dad Per - si -
hom - bres - son fan - tas - mas que re - co - rren la ciu-dad

güen - do sue - ños u - na vez más
u - na vez más je

international Latin standards by María Grever, Agustín Lara, or Antonio Carlos Jobim. In the same piece (e.g., "El bobo," The Fool), one might hear jazz set drumming, fragments of Hammond organ solos, vocal scatting, and excerpts from Beatles songs or the works of Silvio Rodríguez. The result is an almost bewilderingly intricate musical fabric. Example 8 provides a brief excerpt from one Gema y Pável composition that illustrates their creative vocal style and use of extended harmonies. The relative independence of the melodies is typical, with the female voice frequently creating its own countermelody. Accompaniment is provided by piano, bass, drum set, and cello.

Gema y Pável lyrics are personal, intimate, and subjective, a reaction against political slogans and rhetoric. Themes are varied, including love ("Longina"), adult misunderstanding of youthful innocence ("Aixa"), references to figures from Cuban history or folklore ("La caminadora," The Walking Woman), nostalgia, bittersweet memories of life in Cuba ("Domingo A.M.," Sunday A.M.; "Habana, devorando claridad," Havana, Devouring Clarity), self-doubt, depression, loneliness ("¿Hacia dónde?" Where to Go?), or events as simple and poignant as the disappearance of ice cream trucks ("Helado sobre ruedas," Ice Cream on Wheels) in Havana. Overall, the texts

of these and other performers are of a surprisingly high caliber, a tribute to their cultural environment.

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Nueva trova is more directly tied to the Cuban revolutionary experience than any other form of music. It represents an attempt to do something fresh and artistically vital and has created important space for musical experimentation through the years. Songs of the *trovadores* developed in a unique context, one reflecting the values of the socialist leadership and attempts to instill them in young people. The most successful examples of *nueva trova* composition demonstrate a high degree of creativity, poetics, stylistic synthesis, and political awareness. Drawing on diverse sources of inspiration, including music from the United States, Europe, and Latin America, they nevertheless represent an implicit critique of capitalist culture. Young composers attempt to avoid clichéd, formulaic song structures and to create music of high quality that documents the radical experiment of which they are (or were) a part. They consistently write pieces that do more than entertain, that engage the listener intellectually as well as emotionally. Above all, they strive to be true to themselves and to freely express their views on life, politics, and personal relations. Their songs continue to influence countless musicians: jazz performers (Pablo Menéndez, Arturo Sandoval), dance band leaders (Issac Delgado), *rumberos* (Yoruba Andabo), and others.

The spirit of freedom and rebellion surrounding *nueva trova* has inevitably resulted in conflicts with cultural officials. These conflicts were most severe in the late 1960s. *Trovadores* initially performed far from the media, but as their public grew, so too did interest in regulating their work. Most have experienced periods of censure and compromise. They do not emerge unscathed from every conflict but serve a valuable purpose by challenging the status quo. Young composers produce art that is intensely meaningful to local audiences. Humorously or seriously, *trova* contests boundaries of many kinds. It is precisely through engagement with unresolved aesthetic and social issues that it achieves its greatest relevance.

Since *nueva trova* began as a fusion of foreign and national styles, it is not surprising that the voices of young critics continue to find inspiration abroad. Beginning with the emergence of heavy metal groups (Venus, Zeus, and Metal Oscuro) in the 1980s and with Carlos Varela and Vicente Feliú in the 1990s, electrified rock has come to play an ever more prominent role in national music. More recently, rap too has influenced composers, espe-

cially Afro-Cubans. Countless new bands (Anónimo Consejo, Alto y Bajo, Irak) have signed recording contracts and are receiving widespread promotion (Sokol 2000a). *Nueva trova* no longer consists primarily of soloists with an acoustic guitar but is made up of individuals and ensembles that serve as Cuba's musical conscience.

Since the onset of economic crisis, *nueva trova* and even *novísima trova* have experienced a certain decline in popularity. The audience for socially conscious composition has always been circumscribed, appealing strongly to college-educated segments of the population. These days, dance repertoire and other more commercially viable genres represent the center of Cuban music making. Most performers within Cuba are directly involved in the tourist economy and are concerned with the appeal of their music to visitors as well as its sales potential abroad. They tend to write fewer songs oriented toward local listeners and concerns as a result. In retrospect, the period prior to 1989, despite its disadvantages, may have been more supportive of socially conscious art than the current one.

One unforeseen result of such changes is that the most consistent support for first-generation *trovadores* is now among audiences abroad rather than at home. For the politically conscious youth of the 1970s and 1980s who grew up in Latin America and Spain, the Cuban Revolution was a symbol of their aspirations; it demonstrated that grassroots activism could accomplish significant change. This public avidly listened to *trovadores*, performed their songs, and used them as a model to promote progressive musical activity within their own countries. Since most are unfamiliar with day-to-day realities in Cuba, the meanings of early *nueva trova* music remain largely the same for them today as it did when the songs were first written. Silvio Rodríguez, for example, performed in March of 1997 to an ecstatic crowd of thirty thousand in San Juan, Puerto Rico (Martínez Tabares 1997:6). Commentators noted that he, as well as Puerto Ricans Roy Brown, Andrés Jiménez, and others, evoked a powerful nationalist and anticolonialist response in listeners. Even in 1997, in a country that has consistently voted not to break ties with the United States, Silvio was able to briefly "rekindle . . . the spirit of the independence movement" (Correa 1997).

Frederick Starr suggests in his history of jazz in the Soviet Union that whenever government officials began to support particular genres of music (swing, bebop, etc.), it was a sign that they were no longer popular with the public. He further states that attempts to use music as a tool for ideological or political change were doomed there from the outset, that "the ideals of the October Revolution proved incapable of realization in popular music and culture generally unless backed by the use or threat of force" (Starr

1994:334). This commentary is provocative but seems to be contradicted in part by the history of *nueva trova*. It is true that the mass institutionalization of *trova* ultimately lead to greater regulation of its ideological content and its eventual declining popularity among many listeners. However, at the time the government initially endorsed it, the music represented a very popular form of expression and continued to be so for some time. I would argue further that the ideals of socialism as perceived by Cuban youth *have* been reflected in *nueva trova*, and very effectively. The problem is only that policy makers have not always accepted such views. *Trovadores* consistently support government positions they consider beneficial at the same time that they question others. Their songs reflect the attitudes of individuals who not only contemplate socialism in the abstract but have lived it as a reality their entire lives. It is hoped the insights of younger musicians will continue to affect cultural policy in a positive way and contribute to a more inclusive and dynamic socialist reality.

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