



Cuba in Canada: mission possible

BY PEDRO DE LA HOZ —Granma daily staff writer—

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WHEN Alina Orraca heard seven choirs at the University of Lethbridge singing, with such grace and style, a version of “El bodeguero” by Richard Egües, she was certain that her many intense days on Canadian soil had not been in vain.

The same thing happened with Bobby Carcassés at the end of his concert with the jazz group at this center for higher education: the Latin touch had been assimilated from the off and for the young performers, a new road along which to travel had been opened.

The prize-winning choral director and the Cuban jazzman par excellence traveled to this North American nation as protagonists on a long voyage aimed at demonstrating the special characteristics of vocal art and Afro-Cuban jazz to students and professors at centers for artistic and general teaching.

A significant section of them already had prior knowledge of the rigor of Cuban arts teaching, but many of them were approaching for the first time notions of a culture that on occasions is seen beneath the prism of prejudices encouraged by the habitual distortions that generally accompany the media’s treatment of Cuban realities.

For many years, the Cuba-Canada Sports and Cultural Festivals organization has been responsible for establishing bridges between the two countries and doing away with stereotypes, by way of exchanges to stimulate mutual knowledge.

The most recent event in that sense was specifically to promote the tour of Canadian schools and universities by Alina and Bobby, which also extended itself to other sections of the communities in that nation.

Jonathan Watts, president of the institution, told **Granma** that the response of teachers and students alike was one of enthusiasm and eagerness for knowledge not just about the relevant aspects of Cuban musical culture but also about the Revolution’s educational and cultural achievements.

In such a way, the University of Lethbridge choir is set to visit the island this year, led by their director George Evelyn (they have surprisingly staged a version of “El guayaboso” by Guido López Gavilán). At that university, the eminent jazz musician Ed Wasiak expressed his gratitude for having the opportunity to share the stage with Bobby, whom he described as a living legend of Cuban jazz. “It’s a real privilege,” he said, “for our students to learn from and perform with this national Cuban treasure.”

With equal fervor, the multi-talented musician was received in Calgary by Kevin Williams, director of the West Winds Big Band at the Ernest Manning High School.

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