



Monday, May 20, 2013

## Lecuona's Musical Genius Delights

**José Luis Cáceres pleases in recital  
for Pro Arte Musical**

**BY LUIS HERNÁNDEZ MERGAL**  
Special for *El Nuevo Día*

Under the title of *An Evening with the Piano Music of Ernesto Lecuona*, Puerto Rican pianist José Luis Cáceres presented a recital sponsored by Pro Arte Musical of Puerto Rico last Thursday in the Antonio Paoli Hall of the Center for the Fine Arts in Santurce.

Cáceres offered a program of the best music from the Cuban pianist and composer, undoubtedly the greatest exponent of the late romantic pianism in the Caribbean sister island.

The program was an excellent demonstration of the deep knowledge of the instrument that Lecuona possessed, as well as of the pianistic tradition dating back to Chopin and Liszt, passing through the crucible of Gottschalk, Ignacio Cervantes and the great Spanish composers-pianists Albéniz and Granados.

Cáceres opened the evening with the *Preludio en la noche*, a beautifully lyrical composition, performed with elegance and romantic expression. Cáceres is a pianist with an exuberant personality, as was demonstrated in his performance of a selection of *19th-Century Cuban Dances*, in which Lecuona pays tribute to his compatriot and predecessor Ignacio Cervantes.

Cáceres' piano rejoiced between the virtuosity and the Caribbean lyrical grace of the Cuban dances: the octaves of *La primera en la frente*, the mellifluous and graceful section of *A la antigua*, the virtuoso double thirds of the *Impromptu*, the intimate lyricism of *Ella y yo*.

Cáceres gave free rein to his musical imagination in his rendition of the *Suite of Afro-Cuban Dances*, demonstrating a genuine understanding of the rhythmic subtleties of the

creole African heritage that the great Louis Moreau Gottschalk already discovered in the mid-nineteenth century and that Lecuona modernizes with daring percussive dissonances and ingenious combinations of syncopated rhythms. Cáceres was able to capitalize on the genius of Lecuona in the pianistic color of the last and most famous of these dances, *La comparsa*, performed with exquisite taste.

The *Two Salon Pieces* opened the second half of the program: a waltz that really adds nothing original to the rich repertoire of salon pieces produced in the nineteenth century Caribbean, followed by the *Canto del guajiro*, of greater originality and excellent compositional value.

To complete the program we could not miss *Andalucía – Suite española*, in which Lecuona boasts his Iberian musical heritage, combined with a virtuosity of the first order, which Cáceres dominated with astonishing, incredible ease. Maybe the litmus test for the pianist was ending with *Malagueña* - the most popular and most performed of Lecuona's works, and whose interpretation enthused the audience in a unique way.