Ernesto Lecuona: His Life and His Songs

D.M.A. Document

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By

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Abstract

Ernesto Lecuona (1895-1963), known as “The Cuban Gershwin,” is Cuba’s most prolific composer, having composed an estimated 600 works, including 400 songs. The purpose of this document is to explore Lecuona’s compositional style, which reflects the history of Cuban music, and several of his text settings. Cuban nationalism, as it appears in the four songs chosen for review: Malagueña, Siboney, Noche Azul and Siempre en Mi Corazón (Always in My Heart) as well as their instrumentation and accompaniment, will be explored. A comparative analysis of these elements as they relate to his compositional style will also be studied.

Lecuona’s musical development began during his childhood. His sisters, Ernestina and Elenita, provided both piano performance skills and instruction to their little brother, whose prodigious talents were soon known by the Latin American society. Lecuona dedicated his life to concertizing, composition and his two performing groups: The Lecuona Boys and the Orquesta de La Habana. He also enjoyed international status after studying in both Havana and Paris with renowned composers as such Joaquín Nin (1879-1949) and Maurice Ravel (1875-1937). His travels included much of Europe and the United States. His 600 compositions ranged from songs to piano compositions, from ballets to zarzuelas, and from film scores to orchestral suites.
Lecuona’s music remains popular in Latin America and Spain currently, but continues to be relatively unknown in the United States. As a result of this document, I hope to broaden awareness of the man who many consider to be the best Cuban composer by publishing articles and performing recitals of Lecuona’s music.
Dedication

This document is dedicated to my family, especially to my grandparents who sacrificed so much to bring my parents and their siblings to the United States of America from Cuba, seeking a better life for us all and inspiring us to better ourselves: Maria (Abuelita Tina) Cristina Espinosa, Oscar (Yayo) Augusto Espinosa, and Olga (Abuelita Sylvia) Sylvia Perez Winsky.

To my parents, Maria Cristina Espinosa Fontenot and Fidel Issac Perez for their continued love and support.

For Jamie and Lucia, the loves of my life.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Robin Rice, Dr. Donald Larson and Dr. Scott McCoy for their continued mentoring and support throughout this process. A special thanks to Dr. Robin Rice, my advisor, voice teacher and mentor for inspiring me to become a better singer and voice teacher.

I wish to express my gratitude to my family and friends who have supported me throughout this process. Most especially to my dear friend, Judy Durocher, who has been a faithful and loyal friend over these past two years. To Carol and Eric Flora, whose presence in my daughter's life has been a source of comfort and joy throughout this process.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my husband Jamie Flora, thank you for your endless love and support; I could have never done this without you by my side.
Vita

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Northern Arizona University

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2006..............................................................................Festival Artist
Opera New Jersey

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Opera in the Heights

2007......................................................................Resident Artist
Amarillo Opera

2007.....................................................................Carmen/Carmen
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Arizona State University Lyric Opera Theater

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2008........................................................................M.M. Opera Theater
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                                 Pittsburgh Opera

2005-present ............................................................. Opera Scenes Director
                                 Idyllwild Arts Festival, CA

2011-present ............................................................. Opera Scenes Director
                                 Up North Vocal Institute, MI

2013 ................................................................. Suzuki / Madame Butterfly
                                 Opera Columbus

2012-2013 .............................................................. Adjunct Professor of Voice
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**Fields of Study**

Major Field of Study: Music
Vocal Performance

Studies in: Vocal Performance, Opera Performance, Vocal Pedagogy, Vocal Literature, and Diction
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Introduction

I was first introduced to Ernesto Lecuona’s composition, *Malagueña* by my father at a family gathering. The song captured my attention. I was immediately taken by the drama of the piece, which was performed on the piano. Its long melismas harkened back to a Verdian quality, uniquely set with a Cuban flair to it. When I asked about its origin my father was surprised that I was unfamiliar with the work of Lecuona. To my father, Lecuona’s songs were the most popular music of his youth. It was then I began to imagine a recital centered on Cuban music. I was not sure if enough music existed or if there were words to the beloved melodies of a nation unknown to me except through my family. Thus my research in Cuban song written by Ernesto Lecuona began. There were indeed words to these melodies, written by the composer himself. I found there were many more songs than I expected and the research trail began that has led me to the performance and study of four of Lecuona’s most famous Cuban songs: *Malagueña, Siboney, Noche Azul* and *Siempre en Mi Corazón*.

Collecting music and research on Lecuona has proved to be challenging because of the stranglehold that the Cuban government has on all things Cuban and because of the U.S./Cuban embargo. The hope is that as these restrictions ease, Lecuona’s compositions will become more readily available. As a Cuban-American, his music has served for me as a source of inspiration for my performing and I
would like to see his works become more accessible to other singers and performers in the United States.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to bring a greater awareness of Ernesto Lecuona and his popular songs to the classical realm. This study was organized in two segments: 1. A biography of Ernesto Lecuona’s life, including pre and post exile from Cuba, and 2. An in depth study of his four popular songs *Siempre en Mi Corazón*, *Noche Azul*, *Siboney* and *Malagueña*. A study of the history of Cuban music and its rhythmic elements as evidenced in his compositions will be included in the compositional analysis of Lecuona’s songs as well. Additionally, Dr. Suzanne Draayer, one of the foremost researchers on Spanish and Latin American art song in the United States, has most recently been researching Cuban art songs, identifying them as *canciones líricas*. I plan to prove that these four songs by Ernesto Lecuona fall into the canciones líricas category, thereby expanding their accessibility to classical singers.

**Procedures**

The research for this paper began in the OSU library and through on-line search engines for songs composed by Cuban composers that could be presented in a vocal recital. This research narrowed considerably when I encountered the music of Ernesto Lecuona. Lecuona’s early training as a classical pianist, which eventually
evolved into composing songs, ballets, operas, and zarzuelas, was of great interest. Alejo Carpentier's book, *Music in Cuba*, continues to be one of the foremost texts in the study of Cuban music and its components. I also researched Lecuona's beautiful, tuneful melodies, which are both classic and nationalistic in nature. Finally, this nationalism in Lecuona's music led me to study the history of Cuban music.

*Music in Cuba* became an important resource in my study of Cuban songs. There are also two books dedicated exclusively to Ernesto Lecuona: *Ernesto Lecuona El maestro* by Carmela de León and *Ernesto Lecuona: the Genius and his Music* originally written by José Gil and translated by Lecuona's nephew Rafael Lecuona in 2004. Each book poses its challenges. Carmela de León's book is only available in Spanish; therefore I am translating it as I read it. Although Rafael Lecuona’s translation of *Ernesto Lecuona: the Genius and his Music* is only available at two libraries in the United States, the library at Texas A&M has recently sent me a copy for my research purposes. The level of difficulty in obtaining these resources only highlights the need for further research on Ernesto Lecuona in the United States.

As I began to research relevant articles, the name Dr. Suzanne Rhodes Draayer came up continually with regard to Latin American song. I read her article “Seductively Spanish–Programming Ideas for Spanish Song Repertoire” and decided to email her in the hopes of finding more relevant resources. She quickly responded and included an article she is currently editing for the *Journal of Singing* called “Forbidden Songs, Forgotten Treasures–The *Canciones Líricas* of Cuba.” This article has a small portion of it dedicated to Ernesto Lecuona’s songs and it provided further information for this study.
Finally, Lecuona’s music and recordings continue to serve as resources for my study. Plácido Domingo and Hal Leonard partnered with Lecuona’s original publisher E.B. Marks to publish several of his songs in a set aptly called *Siempre en Mi Corazón*, including a compact disc recording. Unfortunately, information on many of Lecuona’s musical scores is not readily available as they are held in Cuba. The U.S./Cuban embargo keeps this information from becoming known. The hope is that the easing of the embargo and improvement in the political climate between Cuba and other countries results in greater access to Cuba and information about Lecuona’s music.

As my Lecture Recital coalesced, I chose to highlight some of the most popular Cuban songs composed by Lecuona. These songs are *Siempre en Mi Corazón, Noche Azul, Siboney* and *Malagueña*. The lecture portion of the recital included information about Lecuona’s life and how he came to be the most renowned Cuban composer to date.
Chapter 1 Ernesto Lecuona’s Life

Ernesto Lecuona Casado (1895-1963) was dubbed “The Cuban Gershwin” after performing George Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* so successfully during his travels in the United States in 1928.¹ His international success was punctuated by performances at Aeolian Hall in New York City, the development and success of his trio “Lecuona Cuban Boys” and his Academy Award nomination for the song *Siempre en Mi Corazón* (Always in My Heart) in the film of the same name in 1942. Born and raised on the tiny island 90 miles south of Florida, he is called by many “the best-known Cuban composer.”² His impressive compositional output of an estimated 600 pieces began in the home that nurtured “one of the greatest musicians of the twentieth century” in Havana, Cuba.³

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Figure 1. Ernesto Lecuona

_El maestro_, as he was nicknamed in Cuban circles, was born in Guanabacoa, a suburb of Havana, on August 6, 1895, to a Cuban mother, Elisa de la Caridad Casado, and Spanish father, Ernesto Lecuona Ramos.⁴ His father emigrated from the Canary Islands as a child to Matanzas, Cuba where he became a newspaper director for publications such as _La Aurora de Yumuri, El Buscapé_ (1879) and _El Constitucional_ (1884).⁵ He met Ernesto’s mother, Elisa, and they married when she was 23 and he was 53 years old.⁶ El Maestro was the youngest of seven children and spent much of his time under the tutelage of his older sisters Ernestina and Elenita. Both girls were fine pianists but it was Ernestina who took Ernesto under her wing and taught

⁵ Ibid., 61.
⁶ Ibid.
him to play the piano.

Lecuona’s first public performance was at age 5, and his first composition was *Cuba y América*, written in 1908 at twelve years of age. It is a two-step, military march that Lecuona dedicated to one of his first piano professors, Carlos Alfredo Peyrellade. The piece was commonly played by bands in Cuba and eventually the band director Jose Marín Varona took the piece to the United States where it became published, igniting a flame of curiosity in Lecuona’s young mind about his future possibilities as a composer. What is most notable about this composition is that it is still performed and widely known. Lecuona's talents were easily recognized and he soon entered the Conservatorio Nacional de la Habana, graduating in 1913 where he was awarded both first prize and a gold medal for his piano performances. Here he studied with Hubert de Blanck, whom he names among his greatest professors: “First of all, my sister Ernestina. Then, Peyrellade, and finally Nin and Hubert de Blanck.” Lecuona emerged from the conservatory with a “need to work everyday;” therefore he composed daily. February 19, 1916 marked an important recital for Lecuona. At the Ateneo de La Habana he performed his own compositions as well as those of Chopin, Grieg, Liszt and Dvorak. This recital propelled him as a great concert pianist of classical works. Audiences gained

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9 Aurelio de la Vega, Grove article.
11 Ibid., 82.
a newfound respect for his mastery of the piano. On July 12, 1916 he played his farewell concert in Havana before traveling abroad.\(^{12}\)

In 1924, Lecuona travelled to Spain and specifically Madrid to enter into a successful tour of concerts with violinist Maria de la Torre. This tour included works by Mozart, Rimsky-Korsakov, Rachmaninoff, Moszkowsky and Liszt. Lecuona also performed several of his own compositions including *Las Danzas Cubanas, Alhambra, Malagueña, and Andaluza* to much acclaim.\(^{13}\) Lecuona himself sent an account of the recital to Havana, recalling, “Artistically, we cannot complain. We have been very successful and all the critics have treated us very well...You can be sure that Marta and I have done everything humanly possible to place our national emblem at the highest place it deserves.”\(^{14}\) This tour led to several more successes in Spain, including his theater pieces in 1925: *Radiomanía, La Revista del Eslava* and *Levántate y Anda*. He stayed in Madrid through 1927 after the opening of his operetta *Rosalina*.\(^{15}\) Lecuona returned to his beloved Cuba full of success and empowered with money. His name had become established.

Back in Cuba, Lecuona set about creating his own lyric theater, aptly named Teatro Lírico Cubano. Here, Lecuona could produce his many zarzuelas and theater pieces in the Regina Theater.\(^{16}\) He continued to compose and it was here in 1927

\(^{12}\) José Gil and Rafael A. Lecuona, *Ernesto Lecuona: the Genius and his Music* (Laredo, Texas: R.A. Lecuona Enterprises, 2004), 82.
\(^{13}\) Ibid., 99.
\(^{14}\) Ibid., 99-100.
\(^{15}\) Ibid., 102-103.
\(^{16}\) Ibid., 107.
that he first performed his famous song *Siboney*.\(^{17}\) Lecuona’s desire to travel continued. Periodically, he flew back to New York to play concerts, and eventually Joaquin Nin (1853-1949) invited him to Paris, France in order to present him in recital.

This trip to Paris resulted in Lecuona’s meeting of the French impressionist composer, Maurice Ravel (1875-1937). Ravel was known for his luscious melodies in compositions such as the orchestral work *Bolero* (1928) and the ballet *Daphnis et Chloé* (1909). Nin, being friends with both Ravel and Lecuona, was anxious for them to be acquainted and set up the recital in Paris for their meeting. Lecuona studied with Nin at some point, although when is not clear. Nin acquired a private hall where Lecuona played a concert for Maurice Ravel, Joaquín Turina, Alexandr Gretchanioff, Herman Bemberg, the ambassador of Cuba in France and Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Quesada, the future president of Cuba, and himself.\(^{18}\) Following this auspicious evening came another series of recitals with the Cuban singer, Lydia de Rivera, and a month long vacation with Nin and Ravel.\(^{19}\) Soon, Lecuona would return to Cuba in order to achieve yet another victory, his performance of George Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*.\(^{20}\)

Lecuona’s international reputation grew on October 2, 1928, the evening he played Gershwin’s famous piece. The reviews were very positive, especially from the *Los Angeles Times*; “Lecuona is a prodigious technician of the piano...Modern

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\(^{17}\) Ibid., 107.
\(^{19}\) Ibid., 109-110.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., 110.
music is favored by his capacity as performer, interpreting Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*, as no one could play it as he does.”\(^\text{21}\) The outpouring of enthusiasm over this success resulted in concerts in Panama, Mexico, the United States, and Spain. During this time, Lecuona established the Orquesta de Ernesto Lecuona, which later developed into Lecuona Cuban Boys, who went on to tour in Europe, South America, the United States and recorded extensively.\(^\text{22}\) In 1943, he debuted his interpretation of *Rhapsody in Blue*, called *Rapsodia Negra*, at Carnegie Hall in New York City.\(^\text{23}\) Hollywood took notice of Lecuona’s compositional ability and hired him to compose eleven film scores including *Always in My Heart* (*Siempre en Mi Corazón*) (1942) and *Carnaval en Costa Rica* (1943).

Lecuona’s love for his country was reciprocated in many ways. Most notably, he was named “Embajador de la Música Cubana”, Ambassador of the Cuban Music, by Cuba’s Education Department in 1937.\(^\text{24}\) He was honored in 1952 by Cuba’s Minister of Education, Félix Lancis.\(^\text{25}\) Writer Joaquín Aristigueta said, “Cuba owed this homage to his greatest musician of the last quarter century, since Lecuona had taken the name of his fatherland across all frontiers. Lecuona made the world sing with a Cuban accent…If Lecuona had the genius for making his fatherland loved by and from all faraway countries, at the same time, he has well earned the greatest

\(^{21}\) José Gil and Rafael A. Lecuona, *Ernesto Lecuona: the Genius and his Music* (Laredo, Texas: R.A. Lecuona Enterprises, 2004), 111.
\(^{22}\) Ibid., 124-125.
\(^{23}\) Ibid., 138.
\(^{24}\) Ibid., 131.
\(^{25}\) Ibid., 152
love with which Cuba pays him.”

Rafael Lecuona, nephew of the composer, explains his uncle’s love of Cuba in reference to La Finca, roughly translated as, The Farm. La Finca, nicknamed La Comparsa after one of Lecuona’s famous songs, was Ernesto Lecuona’s country home in the Guatao zone in the outskirts of Havana, where he lived from 1946-1953. These were happy years where Lecuona entertained both his family and friends amidst his beloved animals and fields. Rafael Lecuona recalls his family going to visit on the weekends, eating, telling jokes, dancing and spending quality time with their famous uncle and his “hangers on,” as he refers to them. The years to follow would bring political turmoil between the Presidential regime of Fulgencio Batista and the communist forces of Fidel Castro. These were tumultuous years that sent Lecuona to both Spain and the United States as a retreat. On December 12, 1963 the Tinerfeño, a newspaper in Santa Cruz, said this of Lecuona’s political involvements in Cuba: “Ernesto Lecuona never received much less enjoyed the help of any government. Neither at home nor abroad did he ever allow in his presence political discussions about his country.” Lecuona spent his final years in exile in New York City, NY, and Tampa, FL, near family until his untimely death on his fateful trip to his father’s homeland in the Canary Islands.

Fidel Castro’s regime overthrew Fulgencio Batista’s presidency in 1959. The political overtaking of this country took time, and as Ernesto Lecuona was both a

26 Ibid., 152.
27 José Gil and Rafael A. Lecuona, Ernesto Lecuona: the Genius and his Music (Laredo, Texas: R.A. Lecuona Enterprises, 2004), 19 and 156.
28 Ibid., 162-163.
famous Cuban and older, his transition to the United States was easier than most. Lecuona continued his work in the U.S. where his health issues increased until he decided to visit Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Canary Islands in 1963, a city in which his father was born and where he died when Lecuona was only seven years old. On his visit, Lecuona travelled to Málaga, where the Mayor honored him for his famous song, *Malagueña*, with a home on the beach at Torrelodones as well as named him “adopted son of Málaga.” As a devout Catholic, Lecuona received these generous gifts and offered the city in return an image of Cuba’s *Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre* to honor the memory of their victim’s due to Hurricane Flora which had just passed through the islands.

On Friday, November 29, 1963 El Maestro died surrounded by friends in Santa Cruz de Tenerife. His health suffered due to a life-long habit of smoking. The official cause of death was “bronconeumonía.” A mass in his honor was given at Santa Lastenia Church, Santa Cruz de Tenerife accompanied by the Symphonic Orchestra of Madrid and a two hundred-voice choir. His body was laid to rest at the Westchester cemetery in the State of New York where he is to remain until Cuba is freed at which point he asked that his remains be taken to his homeland, Cuba.

In 1973, the Cuban government destroyed the home where Ernesto Lecuona was born in Guanabacoa. Conversely, the city of Miami, Florida has honored El Maestro with a marble bust in Dade County. His life and death were honored on

30 Ibid., 171.
31 Ibid., 170-171.
numerous occasions in Cuba, Spain and the United States. His music lives on, with its Cuban nationalism and classicism combined.

Figure 2. Ernesto Lecuona’s Grave Site
Chapter 2 Cuba and its Musical Heritage

Queen Isabella I of Castille and King Ferdinand II of Aragon were on a mission to spread the gospel of Catholicism throughout the known world. Together they sent explorer, Christopher Columbus on an expedition during which he would discover the island now known as Cuba and claim it for Spain on October 29, 1492.\textsuperscript{32} Ironically, the expedition set sail from the Canary Islands, Lecuona’s father’s homeland. It was actually Columbus’s son, Diego Velásquez de Cuéllar (1482-1526), who sent three hundred men to settle the island in either 1511 or 1512.\textsuperscript{33} They established six villas including Bayamo, Trinidad, Sancti Spiritus, San Cristóbal de la Habana, Puerto Príncipe and Santiago de Cuba, which are all still viable towns or cities.\textsuperscript{34}

The Spanish conquerors encountered the Taínos and the Siboneys, aborigines and natives who danced and sang during their customary rituals. The Spanish massacred the natives by the thousands, yet some were able to flee to the mountains to escape the slaughter. Over time, the Taínos people settled in an area later named Cuba. The name Cuba is thought to have come from the native word Cubanacán, meaning “dwelling place,” which replaced the name the conquerors

\textsuperscript{32} Ned Sublette, Cuba and It’s Music (Chicago: Chicago Press Review, 2004), 63-64; Mark Brill, Music of Latin America and the Caribbean (Boston: Prentice Hall, 2011), 119.
\textsuperscript{33} Ned Sublette, Cuba and It’s Music (Chicago: Chicago Press Review, 2004), 62.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
originally gave the island, *Fernandina*.\(^\text{35}\) Eighty percent of the Spaniards who migrated to Cuba were men who took the native women as wives or mistresses. This resulted in the culture of mulata (a mix of black and white women).\(^\text{36}\) The island became prosperous with its increasing crops of tobacco, sugar cane and rum.\(^\text{37}\)

As referenced earlier, the Taínos celebrated their rituals via song and dance. Alejo Carpentier describes the Taínos as occupying themselves with their *areítos*, which were their songs and dances.\(^\text{38}\) Their songs featured the call and response form as well as a chant-like quality. One such song is *Má’ Teodora*.\(^\text{39}\) This song begins with short call and response phrases and ends with a response that repeats ad infinitum until the dancers become so exhausted they fall down.

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Call: “¿Dónde está la Má’ Teodora?
Response: “Rajando la leña está.” ¿Con su palo y su bandola?” “Rajando la leña está.”
Call: “¿Dónde está que no la veo?”
Response: “Rajando la leña está,” repeat ad libitum\(^\text{40}\)
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Unlike the European rhythms, these rhythms had African roots pointing back to the *zarabanda*. The zarabanda rhythm was popular amongst African cultures at the time. This rhythm moved continuously between 6/8 and 3/4 meter signatures.

\(^\text{36}\) Ibid, 71.
\(^\text{39}\) Ibid., 86.
\(^\text{40}\) Ibid.
In his book *Cuba and its Music*, Ned Sublette says the zarabanda was quite popular and spread from Cuba to its cousin Spain and to France for a bit before it became mainstream. Then, as is typical, another rhythm, called the *chacona* became all the rage.\(^{41}\) This rhythm was played on tambourines and castanets and appears to have originated in Havana, although that evidence is not conclusive. The chacona seems to have a constant beat, usually played by an African drum. Some may call this an ostinato of sorts.\(^{42}\) These rhythms were the birth of the rhythmic foundation that was to become a hallmark of Cuban music.

The zarabanda and the chacona evolved into the Cuban contradanza that

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 82.
appeared more frequently in Cuban music. Manuel Saumell (1817-1870) and Ignacio Cervantes (1847-1905) were also composers of such rhythmic figures.\textsuperscript{43} Saumell’s composition, *La Tedezco* serves as one of the first examples of the tango rhythm combined with a sixteenth note figure pulsing throughout.\textsuperscript{44}

![Figure 4. La Tedezco by Manuel Saumell](image)

Ignacio Cervantes, according to Gerard Béhague, was the “most important nineteenth century Cuban composer from a technical as well as an aesthetic point of view.”\textsuperscript{45} Best known for his *Danzas Cubanas* for piano, Cervantes manages to keep

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\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 103.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
the Cuban contradanza within the classical realm. Cervantes kept the popular Cuban conga rhythm as well as the ciniquillo rhythmic pattern. Béhague calls this the most characteristic figure of Cuban folk and popular music.

Figure 5. Ciniquillo

These popular rhythms became synonymous with dances within the Cuban population. The zapateado and the bailes de salon “ballroom dances,” were both popular dances throughout Europe and more specifically Spain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These dances included the waltz, the minuet, quadrilles and rigodones. It was the combination of dance rhythms from Spain, mixed with the aforementioned contradanza and Afro-Cuban rhythms, that sparked new rhythms and dances in Cuba. One rhythm especially is said to have originated in Havana, Cuba, the habanera. Typically played in a 2/4 meter with a dotted delay in the second note of the figure, the habanera literally means a dance from Havana.

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46 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
The ciniquillo and the habanera share the 2/4 meter signature, but they differ when it comes to the strength of the second beat. In the ciniquillo, the second beat is held over whereas in the habanera, the second beat is pulsed and given strength. The habanera became a central rhythmic figure in many Cuban compositions, especially in Lecuona’s songs, *Siboney* and *Noche Azul*.

Other significant rhythmic devices in Cuban music include the trova and the bolero. The name trova comes from the medieval troubadours or trouvères. These travelling musicians led a bohemian lifestyle, wandering the countryside in song and dance. The trova included a syncopated guitar rhythm with lyrics that were both romantic and full of longing. The political climate in Cuba led the people to find solace in their beautiful island and in the mountains. They would use these retreats as an escape from their oppression and find inspiration in song and dance. One such

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51 Ibid., 130.
52 Ibid., 131.
example is the popular song, *La bayamesa* by Cuban rebel leader, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, which is in the trova style. The bolero is derived from the dance of the same name, popularized in the Spanish court in the 1780’s by the dancer Sebastián Cerezo.\(^{53}\) The bolero can be in either duple or triple meter, with the dance typically being in triple meter and the Cuban song form in duple meter.

![Figure 7. Bolero](image)

Both the trova and the bolero exist in major and minor keys.\(^{54}\) It is this juxtaposition of sorrow and hope that Ernesto Lecuona captures in his bolero-son style of the *Malagueña*. This will be discussed further in chapter 4.

Son literally means “sound,” however this word loses its subtext in translation. To the Cuban people, son is a style of song. It is a more popularized version of the classical song. Mixed with strong drumbeats and Afro-Cuban rhythms, the son is said to have first emerged in 1893 in the aforementioned, *Má’


\(^{54}\) Ibid., 131.
By the 1920’s composers were taking songs from the mountains surrounding Santiago and developing them into full-fledged songs with orchestration, soloists and choruses. The most famous Cuban son, known by all Cubans and depicting the story of a peasant girl from Guantánamo, is Guajira Guantanamera. Written by Diablo Wilson and first sung by Josesito Fernández, this epic son is usually accompanied by guitar and a chorus. The lyrics about the young peasant girl reflect upon the nature of the son to feel romantic and free.

The popularity of the son in the 1920's had much to do with the fact that the

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57 Ibid., 134-135.
President of Cuba, Gerardo Machado, liked the style.\textsuperscript{59} Simultaneously, electrical recording was surpassing acoustical recording and American record companies were recording many of the Cuban son sextets that became popular in the 1920-30’s.\textsuperscript{60} One of the most famous son sextets was the “Sexteto Habanero” that won the first son competition in 1925. These groups feature six musicians who sang and played several instruments. These instruments typically included two guitars, an acoustic bass, and percussion instruments such as maracas, güiros and congas.\textsuperscript{61}

Figure 9. Sexteto Occidente, 1926

Around 1513, Cuba began to see an influx of slaves and slave trade from Africa. An estimated 1.5 million slaves were bought and traded on the island by 1886 when slavery was abolished, due largely to the growing Afro-Cuban atmosphere. The African influence became an indelible part of the Cuban culture and of its music. Emilio Grenet, Cuban musician and historian, points out that it is the influence of the African drum that is significant.

Percussion instruments dominate the Cuban sound. Reflecting the island’s African heritage, these instruments influenced the Afro-Cuban rhythms and sounds. The following are a few of the important percussion instruments commonly found in a Cuban band. The maracas are among the most popular, having originated from the Taínos population. Maracas are a pair of round gourds filled with dry seeds. The guiro is a hollow calabash that has several ridges on it. It is usually scraped with a metal or wooden stick. The cencerro is a cowbell made of copper. The congas are a drum of leather stretched across wood and played by hand. The timbales are a pair of short drums made out of metal and played with drumsticks. The bongos are a pair of small drums where one is typically pitched lower than the other. Finally the claves or palitos are a pair of hardwood sticks and are, “a distinctly Cuban creation derived from elements of both cultures [Spanish and

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Mark Brill calls the guitar the most important instrument in the Caribbean. The *guitarra*, “guitar,” made its home in Cuba easily as the singers of trovas could travel throughout the countryside carrying such an instrument. The guitar came from Spain where two versions existed: 1. The upper class guitar called a vihuela, which resembled a modern day twelve string guitar and 2. The guitarra, which was a six-string, simpler version. The vihuela was so elite and unpopular that it became extinct and replaced by the lower class guitarra. Today the tres, a small six-string version of the guitar, is the most popular guitar in Cuba. Sindo Garay (1867-1968) is well known for his guitar playing and for his melodies. Born in Santiago de Cuba this *juglar*, as Ned Sublette calls him, was known for his travels to the Dominican Republic and is thought to have introduced the bolero to its peoples. Garay’s single most important influence is as a guitar player. His melodies are still sung today throughout Cuba.

Along with Sindo Garay, composers such as Laureano Fuentes Matons (1825-1898), Ignacio Cervantes, (1847-1905), Guillermo Manuel Tomás Bouffartigue (1868-1933), Eduardo Sánchez de Fuentes (1874-1944), and Joaquín Nin (1879-1949) established the foundation for Cuban art song. Ernesto Lecuona was

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65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
influenced both directly and indirectly by this lineage of composers that came before him. Draayer poses the question as to whether Lecuona’s songs fit into the category of art song, canciones líricas, or rather that of popular song such as those of his contemporary George Gershwin. The question lingers as an in-depth study of four of Lecuona’s most famous songs lies ahead.

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Chapter 3 Lecuona’s Composition Style and Influences

An extremely prolific composer, Ernesto Lecuona is credited with an impressive output of at least 406 songs, 176 piano pieces, 53 theater works (including zarzuelas, operettas, theater pieces, one opera), 31 orchestral scores, 6 piano concertos, 5 ballets, and 11 film scores. This extensive compositional productivity came from his diligent, personal commitment to writing daily. In an interview with reporter Villa Ronda, Lecuona describes his preference for beginning the day by working on his music, saying “just minutes after I got out of bed. That is, at eight o’clock in the morning.” He recalls he would work anytime a melody struck him. Often in the midst of a casual chat with a friend or while playing cards, he would jot down an idea on a napkin. Given his skill as a pianist, it is interesting to note that Lecuona chose to use the piano sparingly when composing. He tended only to turn to the keyboard for confirming or fleshing out an idea, preferring to compose from memory.

Lecuona admired his teachers, Hubert DeBlanc and Joaquín Nin, and colleagues such as Maurice Ravel, Eliseo Grenet, Joaquín Turina, and José Iturbi, but he took much of his inspiration from his favorite composers: Beethoven (1770-

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73 José Gil and Rafael A. Lecuona, Ernesto Lecuona: the Genius and his Music (Laredo, Texas: R.A. Lecuona Enterprises, 2004), 153.
74 Ibid., 152-153.
1827), Chopin (1810-1849), Debussy (1862-1918) and Gershwin (1898-1937), It has been said that of these, Debussy was his favorite but Lecuona never confirmed this.\textsuperscript{75} There is interest in the fact that Lecuona played Gershwin’s \textit{Rhapsody in Blue} for Gershwin himself upon their first meeting. Gershwin is reported to have called it one of the finest interpretations of the piece ever played.\textsuperscript{76}

While this list of composers would influence Lecuona’s style on many levels - harmonically, formally, and tonally - the most important factor in common is that they, like Lecuona, are all known for their beautiful, distinct, and memorable melodies. It is George Gershwin’s influence that would have the greatest bearing on what would come to be Lecuona’s compositional style. Gershwin’s melding of classical forms mixed with popular melodies is part of what made Lecuona and Gershwin so similar and also what contributed to their success as composers. Gershwin became a trendsetter, blurring the boundaries between classical and popular music of his day.\textsuperscript{77} Grout describes this as Gershwin’s “attempt to combine the languages of jazz and Lisztian Romanticism.”\textsuperscript{78} These are qualities that Lecuona’s music displays as well. He used traditional Cuban melodies of the day in combination with elements of his formal European training to create an amalgam that, like Gershwin, became almost its own genre. The two composers are often compared, as they have both been successful creating works that bridge popular and classical music styles.

\textsuperscript{75} José Gil and Rafael A. Lecuona, \textit{Ernesto Lecuona: the Genius and his Music} (Laredo, Texas: R.A. Lecuona Enterprises, 2004), 160.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid, 823.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
Another common theme among the composers that influenced Lecuona was the tendency to break from the compositional tradition of their era. Beethoven, for example, transcended the ideas of the Classical period by expanding upon traditional forms and using bigger, more dramatic movements than what was previously used. Carol Kimball describes Beethoven’s song repertoire as having an “experimental nature.”\(^7^9\) Similarly, Lecuona further develops Ignacio Cervantes’ wildly popular piano danzas. Known as the grandfather of Cuban music, Cervantes, “Cuba’s most important musician of the 19th century,”\(^8^0\) set-up the classical Cuban style. This became the format within which Cuban composers furthered classical Cuban music. Like that of Beethoven, Lecuona’s break from the norm, by expanding upon Cervantes’ traditional style, was considered fresh and novel.

Chopin and Lecuona, both lovers of the piano, shared an intense nationalistic, patriotic connection to their respective homelands. Chopin expressed his nationalistic feelings by composing traditional mazurkas, polonaises, and cracoviana. Lecuona showed patriotism for his fatherland by incorporating typical Cuban rhythms and danzas such as the habanera, malagueña, trova, and bolero into his compositions.\(^8^1\) “Although Chopin lived in Paris from 1831, he never ceased to love his native Poland or to be afflicted by her misfortunes. His mazurkas, impregnated with the rhythms, harmonies, forms, and melodic traits of Polish popular music (though usually without any direct quotations from Polish folk themes) are among

\(^7^9\)Carol Kimball, *Song: A Guide to Style and Literature* (Seattle: Pst...Inc., 1996), 57.
\(^8^1\)José Gil and Rafael A. Lecuona, *Ernesto Lecuona: the Genius and his Music* (Laredo, Texas: R.A. Lecuona Enterprises, 2004), 230-231.
the earliest and best examples of Romantic music inspired by national idiom. In particular, the ‘Lydian’ raised 4th, characteristic of Polish folk music, is present even in his earliest works.”82 Sadly, and ironically, Chopin, like Lecuona passed away far from his beloved homeland.

Claude Debussy is also an example of a departure from the compositional norm of the day. He expanded upon the classic French tradition. Moving the art form into the impressionist era is an important element of Debussy’s musical contribution. Lecuona, greatly influenced by Debussy, was also able to delve into impressionism, becoming an expert on the style of “sensuous impressions” through “harmony and tone color.”83 In his music, he utilizes luscious harmonies to paint the mood and environment of Cuba. Perhaps Debussy’s strongest influence on Lecuona is evident in Lecuona’s melodious and memorably evocative tunes.

Biographers have divided Lecuona’s music into three eras: 1. Beginning 1908-1930, 2. Middle 1930-1940 and 3. End 1940-1963. The first two eras contain his most famous works and his most productive years.84 The first era begins in 1908 with his first composition as a young boy, Cuba y América, and yields many of his most beloved melodies including two of his most famous songs, Malagueña (1922) and Siboney (1927).

The second era included time spent working on film scores for MGM, Warner

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83 Ibid.
84 José Gil and Rafael A. Lecuona, Ernesto Lecuona: the Genius and his Music (Laredo, Texas: R.A. Lecuona Enterprises, 2004), 160-161.
Lecuona had an avid interest in movies due to employment in his youth at a movie theater in Havana that showed silent films. He was hired to play the piano as background accompaniment for the silent pictures. Later in life, he published piano rolls for player pianos, causing Hollywood to take notice. He was hired to score eleven films including: *Under Cuban Skies* (MGM, 1931), *Free Soul* (MGM, 1931), *Susana Lenox* (MGM, 1931), *Pearl Harbor* (MGM, 1942), *The Cross and the Sword* (MGM, 1956), *Always in My Heart* (Warner Brothers, 1942), *La Ultima Melodia* (Cuban film, unknown year), *One More Tomorrow* (Warner Brothers, 1946), *Carnival in Costa Rica* (20th Century Fox, 1947), *María La O* (Mexican film, 1959), and *Adios Buenos Aires* (Argentine film, 1938). During his final era, he composed sporadically, but did not produce a significant output. Toward the end of his life, the political turmoil of the day caused in Lecuona a sense of depression and hopelessness as the freedom of expression and thought in Cuba was slowly suffocated by the rise of Communism. He spent much of this third era outside of his beloved homeland, which had hitherto been a source of inspiration.

Lecuona’s style has been described by Thomas Tirino as romantic and full of human emotion. Tirino goes on to say, “the principal characteristics of Lecuona’s music are beautiful melodies and powerful Spanish and Afro-Cuban

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87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
rhythms...combined with a rich harmonic frame and a delicate tonal palette.” The romantic, emotional compositional style is similar to, and heavily influenced by, both European and American composers. Like Gershwin, Beethoven, Chopin, and Debussy, Lecuona was able to expand upon the music of the day, in his homeland. He straddled the genres of popular and classical music throughout the compositional eras of his life. Lecuona’s music embodies the influences of these composers and more; he unearths and incorporates the Cuban rhythms and exotic flavors of his ancestry, and creates a unique Cubanistic musical form. These forms and styles will be discussed further in an in depth study of four of his most famous songs: *Malagueña*, *Siboney*, *Noche Azul* and *Siempre en Mi Corazón*.

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Chapter 4 Lecuona’s canciones líricas:

Malagueña, Siboney, Noche Azul and Siempre en Mi Corazón


Canciones líricas, literally translated as “lyrical songs” seems the most appropriate term when speaking of Cuban art song, as it illustrates the dual nature of the musical form. Combining classical structure and western harmony, African and Afro-Cuban rhythms, and local folk lyrics, canciones líricas becomes its own unique entity, distinguishing Cuban song from previous generations of art song and future generations of popular music.

The purpose of this chapter is to show that Ernesto Lecuona’s songs should certainly be considered and classified as canciones líricas. This is particularly evident in Lecuona’s four songs, Malagueña, Siboney, Noche Azul and Siempre en Mi Corazón because they successfully straddle the classical and popular worlds. Indeed, in a review of a recorded album, which includes these songs, Juliet Hill stated that these pieces are “an excellent introduction, both to Lecuona’s output and

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Cuban *canciones líricas.*

In her article, Draayer poses many significant questions about Cuban music and, more specifically, what elements constitute a Cuban art song. In determining if a song is indeed a *canción lírica* she asks: 1. Does the Cuban composer bridge the semi-classical and classical world? 2. Who is a true Cuban? 3. What constitutes a true Cuban art song?

Clearly, as discussed in chapters 1 and 3, the answer to the first question is affirmative. As Lecuona was accomplished in both classical and popular arenas of composition, there is no question as to his validity as a force in the Cuban classical music world. As to the second question of nationality, there is no doubt that Lecuona is a true Cuban. Born and raised in Cuba, he maintained his residence, La Comparsa, near Havana, and made his life’s work out of composing music in a Cuban style, despite his formal European training.

The final question is more difficult to answer, and therefore deserves further discussion. Lecuona implements his 19th century influences, as discussed in chapters 1 and 3, to establish a balance between the classical structure and popular, nationalistic text in order to create his unique songs. While the forms utilized in many of his songs are of a classical nature, the style and lyrics tended to be more popular as he often penned them himself. Some debate continues about whether Lecuona’s songs should be classified as popular or canciones líricas. Draayer leaves

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the decision of song classification up to the singer saying, "The singer will need to
decide if the Lecuona songs are art song or vernacular in style."93

Before one can answer the question of what truly is a Cuban art song, or
canción lírica, one needs to discuss art song itself. In Carol Kimball’s book, Song, she
describes art song as “a unique blend of word and sound, poetry and music.”94 She
then explores the visceral, emotional connection a listener undergoes saying,

“When we hear a song, we experience it as a complete entity – we get an
overall impression. Our understanding of the song’s art is stimulated by the
images in the song, which composers create with words, melodies,
harmonies, and rhythms. All the images of the poem merge with the images
in the music, creating the distinctive overall images of the song...As we listen,
we respond to those images, we form mental pictures and experience
emotions, or even tastes, smells, and physical sensations.”95

This definition transcends cultures and language, as one experiences this feeling in
French mélodie, German lieder, and, in relation to this discussion, Cuban canciones líricas. Lecuona certainly achieved this effect by utilizing his self-authored,
folkloric-style texts in combination with nationalistic Cuban melodies, harmonies,
and rhythmic structures.

In combing through Lecuona’s prolific library of song compositions,96 four
songs, Malagueña, Siboney, Noche Azul and Siempre en Mi Corazón, truly encapsulate
the nature of canciones líricas.

95 Ibid.
**Malagueña/Málaga-girl**

Malagueña is a term that refers to a popular dance in the flamenco style as well as to a woman from the Spanish region of Málaga. Grove music online defines it as, “a song type denoting Andalusian roots as opposed to the more serious and intense *cante jondo* of gypsy origin.”

Popular in the nineteenth century, this commonly triple-metered dance could have been danced by pairs of two or four dancers. When this dance style reached the Canary Islands, its popularity flourished and the Malagueña soon reached Mexico and Latin America.

Some common elements of the Malagueña include a two-part structure, the three-beat rhythmic pattern, and a chord progression of [i–iv–i]. There are often folk texts that include six lines of repeated words, and lighthearted indigenous cultural references. All of these attributes are represented in Lecuona’s composition of the *Malagueña*.

Lecuona’s *Malagueña* was derived from *Andalucía*, his famous piano suite composed in 1927-28. In this classical set, Lecuona included a section called “Malagueña.” This piece was in a two-part structure, 3/4 meter, and originally in the key of C# minor. It immediately begins with the Spanish melody in the right hand and a strong pulsing ostinato in the left hand. “With time it would become an indispensable work of music, a mixture of Spanish danza with the Latin-American

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98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.
plea and passion giving the vocalized Malagueña, when [sung], a very peculiar Spanish air without losing its Andalusian charm as seen through the prism of Cuban eyes.”

In 1928, Lecuona published a version of this same Malagueña for voice and piano, adding his own folkloric lyrics. The song follows the piano suite in both form and content, while incorporating the vocal line. In 1997, E. B. Marks, the publisher of preference for Ernesto Lecuona’s works, collaborated with Hal Leonard to distribute a new publication of Lecuona’s songs. Always in My Heart: Siempre en Mi Corazón, The Songs of Ernesto Lecuona was produced for and recorded by famed

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tenor, Plácido Domingo. This is the edition that is most readily available to singers in the United States and it transposes the song Malagueña to the key of E minor, to suit Domingo’s vocal tessitura.\(^\text{101}\)

Figure 11. Malagueña mm. 1-5

Lecuona continues with the original idea of the Malagueña as a three-metered dance, setting the song in a 3/4 time signature. His Malagueña maintains the traditional structure including a two-part form that repeats. One exception, however, to the standard dance form is the addition of an operatic-style accompanied recitative section in the beginning that introduces a strong rhythmic ostinato in the left hand of the accompaniment. The overall form of the song is [recitative-A-B-A'-B'].

Figure 12. Malagueña piano/vocal score (continue)
Harmonically, the recitative section begins with a strong minor tonic chord for twelve measures in the bass line, moving directly into the traditional harmonic subdominant chord of the *Malagueña*. The bass line provides a steady platform for the sweeping vocal line above it.

The vocal line in *Malagueña* spans an octave and a third with the tessitura primarily lying at the top of the treble clef. The melodic contour follows a natural arc, highlighting the top range of the voice for dramatic emphasis. The accompaniment continues to give an emphatic first beat with the left hand as the right hand draws upon melismatic motives that are fluid throughout the song. The accompaniment completely drops out, creating a secco recitative in the A’ section. Finally, the accompaniment comes back in the B’ section, slowly at first and then
with fervor. The artist sings “tra-la-ra-la” and “ah” continuously to the final chord as is typical in Spanish song.

Figure 13. *Malagueña* mm. 49-52

Lecuona adds non-diatonic pitches for both color and text painting. In the key of E minor, he adds a G# in the recitative section five times. Each time, the vocal line departs from this G# as the text infers a hopeful return to the lover. Similarly, he lowers the second scale degree just above the main tessitura of the piece, most significantly the last time on the word “dolor”, literally meaning, “pain.”

As with many of his canciones, Lecuona wrote the text himself. He utilizes a time-honored story, the idea of a performer’s obsession with a girl from Málaga. His text describes a woman with dark eyes as they draw him closer and he longs for her kiss. This dramatic, traditional text, combined with the general thrust of the harmonic structure continues to highlight the juxtaposition between classical...
structure and a popular lyric, creating the unique style that is emblematic of a
cancion lírica. The Malagueña was so popular in its time that over 100,000 copies of
the sheet music were sold in the year it was published. Gil and R.A. Lecuona write
that, “…we must emphasize that Malagueña, together with Siboney and La Comparsa
[another vocal composition], is one of the Maestro’s compositions interpreted most.
When music was edited on paper only, about 100,000 [copies of] Malagueña sheet
music were sold annually just in the United States.”

El amor me lleva hacia ti
Con impulso arrebatador.
Yo prefiero mejor morir
Que vivir sin tener tu amor.
La inconstancia de tu querer
La alegría mató en mi ser.
Ay, al temor de perder tu amor
Hoy mi canto sólo es dolor.

Malagueña de ojos negros,
Malagueña de mis sueños,
Me estoy muriendo de pena
Por tu querer.
Te quiero besar.

Love draws me to you
With a passionate thrust.
I would rather die
Than live without your love.
Your fickleness
Kills gladness in my soul.
Yes, for fear of losing you
All I can sing of is sadness.

Malaga-girl, you of the dark eyes,
Malaga-girl, you of my dreams,
I am dying of the grief
Of loving you.
I want to kiss you.

Figure 14. Malagueña lyrics and translations

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**Siboney/Siboney**

The Siboney were an indigenous people already settled on the island of Cuba when the Spanish arrived and began to colonize.\(^{103}\) Lecuona’s famous song, composed in 1927, uses the term Siboney as a woman’s name.\(^{104}\) Lecuona describes the jungle, the palms, and huts built by the traditional tribesmen where, far off in the mountains, a lover awaits Siboney’s return. By utilizing the indigenous name, Siboney, as well as evocative descriptions of Cuba’s natural environment, Lecuona has again incorporated a nationalistic element in his canciones líricas. A combination of folkloric text referring back to the Siboney natives and a repeated habanera rhythm in the bass harkens back to the Afro-Cuban roots of Lecuona’s birth.

The haunting melody spans an expansive range of an eleventh, providing a pitch scope that demands a classically trained singer’s abilities. Lecuona again mixes modes in *Siboney*, beginning in d minor and modulating to D major in measure 33. Here, the mood of the piece elevates from melancholy to hopeful while simultaneously elevating the tessitura. The initial phrase of the D major section begins immediately with a vocal leap to an F#, the second highest note in the canción.

The vocal line and the accompaniment each demonstrate a mix of syncopated

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and simple rhythms. The habanera rhythm repeats in the left hand as the right hand shadows the vocal line. Its vocal line follows a traditional arc, moving from tonic and following in steps and in thirds, up to the crest of the phrase before it comes back down. Lecuona employs non-diatonic notes including C#, Bb and F natural, additionally emphasizing the passion the singer feels for Siboney.

Further underlining the need for a trained singer’s expertise, are recurring held notes. Starting with several three-beat sustained pitches and elongating by the end of the minor section to numerous six and seven-beat sustained notes at the end of lengthy phrases, further illustrates that the singer would benefit from being classically trained in breath control. These technical demands conclude that the Siboney is of a classical art song variety.
Figure 15. *Siboney* mm. 29-36
Siboney,
Yo te quiero,
Yo me muero por tu amor.
Siboney,
En tu boca
La miel puso su dulzor.
Ven a mí,
Que te quiero
Y que todo tesoro
Eres tú para mí.
Siboney,
Al arrullo
De la palma pienso en ti.
Siboney,
De mis sueños,
Si no oyes la queja de mi voz.
Siboney,
Si no vienes
Me moriré de amor.
Siboney
De mis sueños
Te espero con ansia en mi caney,
Porque tú eres el sueño
De mi amor,
Siboney.
Oye el eco
De mi canto de cristal.
No se pierda
Por entre el rudo manigual.

Siboney,
I love you,
I would die for your love.
Siboney,
Your lips
Are as sweet as honey.
Come to me,
Because I love you
And you are a treasure
To me.
Siboney,
The sweet lullaby
Of the palms makes me think of you.
Siboney,
You are in my dreams,
When you are not near.
Siboney,
If you do not come to me,
I shall die brokenhearted.
Siboney
Of my dreams,
I will await you anxiously in my hut,
For you are my dream
Of love,
Siboney.
Hear the echo
Of my tender cry.
Don’t get lost
On your way through the jungle.

Figure 16. Siboney lyrics and translations
**Noche Azul/Blue Night**

There is no definitive date for the composition of *Noche Azul*, although it is estimated that Lecuona composed it between 1930-1940, placing it within his second era of writing. *Noche Azul* has a characteristically extended or stretched ciniquillo rhythm. This rhythmic pattern repeats in the second bar of each four bar phrase. Each verse then repeats, giving the song a simple AABB form reminiscent of the tradition tribal call and response form used by the native peoples.

This sensual melody spans an octave and a fifth as it repeats a syncopated, four bar phrase throughout. The A section establishes the key of F major, diverting itself from major once with a B-natural to the Lydian mode as the vocal line ascends on measure 11. This chromatic alteration allows the melody to ascend into the upper heights of the singers range as well as to illustrate the meaning of the text, “vuelve de nuevo adar paz a mi corazón,” translated as, “come to me again and bring peace to my heart,” which is both hopeful and peaceful. The B section mirrors the A section in its rhythmic mapping, including syncopated rhythms at the beginning of the vocal line followed by repeated eighth notes in the third bar of each phrase. One E-flat appears on measure 30 as well as a D-flat in measure 37. Both chromatic alterations add color and nuance to what is already a sensuous vocal line, hinting at “natural” minor, but never really modulating away from major.

The accompaniment continuously mimics the vocal line an octave above with the right hand, leaving the left hand to flow throughout the song using sixteenth notes to outline the harmonic structure. Lecuona repeats the title line, “noche azul,” three times, each one ascending higher than its predecessor. The final “noche azul”
is elongated into two quarter-notes and three half-notes that are held to the end of the song. This time the vocal line rises to its highest note, A5, requiring both vocal expertise and expression.

The text, once again, is evocative of Cuban scenic elements. Centering on the island night sky, the performer beckons the blue night to shed its moonlight on him and bring peace to a lovesick heart. The beautiful blue night of Cuba reflects the delight in and remembrance of love, a common theme in passionate Latin American texts. These words linger longingly and simply in a slow, moderato tempo, F major key, and 2/4 time signature. This is further evidence of Lecuona's 19th century influences, as Grout describes 19th century Romanticism saying, “Romanticism cherishes freedom, movement, passion, and endless pursuit of the unattainable...romantic art is haunted by a spirit of longing, of yearning after an impossible fulfillment.”

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Figure 17. Noche Azul mm.1-20
Noche azul,
Que en mi alma reflejó
La pasión
Que soñaba acariciar,
Vuelve de nuevo
A dar paz a mi corazón.
¿No ves que muero de dolor?
Ven noche azul,
Ven otra vez
A que me des tu luz.
Mira que está mi corazón
Ansioso de amar.
Ven otra vez,
Que yo sin ti
No he de gozar
La dicha de amor.
Ven, que me muero de dolor.
Noche azul.

Blue night,
That saw my spirit glow
With the passion
Of treasured dreams,
Come to me again
And bring peace to my heart.
Can't you see that I’m dying of love?
Come, blue night,
Come once more
And show me your light.
See, it is my heart
That is so eager to love.
Come once more,
For without you
I take no pleasure
In the delights of love.
Come, or I will die of love.
Blue night.

Figure 18. Noche Azul lyrics and translations

Siempre en Mi Corazón/Always in My Heart

An immensely simple and beautiful melody set in cut time, and marked andante cantabile, *Siempre en Mi Corazón* is a hallmark work of Lecuona’s canciones líricas. Composed in 1930, Lecuona first titled this famous song *No te Puedo Querer* or *I Can’t Love You*. Years later he was commissioned by Warner Bros. to compose the film score for the 1942 movie *Always in My Heart* and he changed both

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the lyrics and name to accommodate the title of the movie.\textsuperscript{107} With the release of the movie, a formerly unknown song became an instant sensation.\textsuperscript{108} Lecuona became a household name when the song was nominated for an Academy Award for best musical score.\textsuperscript{109}

*Siempre en Mi Corazón* is organized in a short AABA' form, in the key of C-Major with free use of modal mixture and jazzy “blue notes” that in the vocal line that prohibit the piece from truly resolving until the final cadence. It has the freedom to be repeated and interpreted at the singer’s desire, a concept that once more reflects the influence of traditional native Cuban singing. This interpretation is due not only to the harmonic ambiguity at the beginning but also to the even eighth notes that repeat six times at the beginning of each section, leaving the rhythmic balance for the singer to determine.

This melody, much like the three songs previously mentioned, follows a natural melodic contour that rises in the middle of the phrase and descends naturally, mostly moving in stepwise motion. It is considerably easier from a tessitura standpoint as there are no high, sustained pitches. In fact, most of the sustained pitches are in the middle voice on B or A. However, the piece could be difficult for singers with intonation issues in the middle voice as there is much more chromatic movement than in the other pieces. This can be particularly difficult for women since much of this chromaticism occurs around A, B, and C on the staff,

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
which is a notoriously difficult spot for untrained female singers. Like the previous songs, the accompaniment outlines the vocal line in the right hand and maintains a steady beat of one and three in the left hand.

Lecuona’s modest lyrics are once again representative of the folklore of the Cuban people, painting a picture of lovers missing each other, separated by miles, and knowing that no one could replace their love for one another. It is at once charming and romantic, simple and beautiful. The rhythm is straightforward, with room for rhythmic manipulation and improvisatory manipulation of the phrases.
Figure 19. *Siempre en Mi Corazón* mm.1-10
Estás en mi corazón
Aunque estoy lejos de ti,
Y es el tormento mayor
De esta fatal separación.
Estás en mi corazón
Y en mi amarga soledad
El recuerdo de tu amor
Disminuye mi penar.
Yo bien sé que nunca más
En mis brazos estarás,
Prisiónera de un cariño
Que fue toda mi ilusión.
Pero nada me poderé
Que te deje de quereré
Porque como única dueña
Estás en mi corazón.
Estás en mi corazón.
Y en mi amarga soledad
El recuerdo de tu amor
Disminuye mi penar.
Estás en mi corazón.

You are in my heart,
Though I am far from you,
And this is the greatest torment
Of this fated separation.
You are in my heart,
And in my bitter loneliness
The memory of your love
Lessens my pain.
I know that never more
Will you be in my arms,
Prisoner of a love
That was totally an illusion.
Yet nothing can keep me
From wanting you,
Because you, my only love,
Are in my heart.
You are in my heart.
And in my bitter loneliness
The memory of your love
Lessens my pain.
You are in my heart.

Figure 20. Siempre en Mi Corazón lyrics and translations

This 1942 hit song, along with Malagueña, Siboney and Noche Azul, was rerecorded in 1997 and became the title of an album by international, operatic tenor Plácido Domingo, thus further securing Ernesto Lecuona’s position in the classical world and maintaining his songs’ position in the canciones líricas genre of Cuba.
Chapter 5: Music in Exile

While one can now see that Lecuona’s works can be clearly established as canciones líricas, the question remains as to why the works aren’t more commonly found on vocal recitals in the western world. While known for his lush melodies and folksy, accessible texts, he is not programmed in performances on a par with his contemporaries. And, while his songs have been performed and recorded by the likes of Connie Francis, The Andrew Sisters, Mel Tormé, Chet Atkins, Stan Kenton, Liberace, Wynton Marsalis and of course Plácido Domingo – whose parents were close friends with Lecuona – Lecuona’s music does not have the same widespread performance as one would expect. 110

One can certainly attribute this to the political atmosphere in Cuba. Due to the embargo imposed upon the island, there is extraordinary difficulty in exporting music. "The US trade embargo with Cuba complicates the purchase of Cuban products, including musical scores."111 Lecuona’s publications of his music, in collaboration with Cuban publisher E. B. Marks, fall directly under the U.S. Embargo on Cuba. As is stated in the 1962 proclamation, the United States Government’s decision to “promote national and

hemispheric security” by isolating and limiting “the importation into the United States of all goods of Cuban origin and all goods imported from or through Cuba” directly effects the dispersing of Lecuona’s music.\textsuperscript{112} Though Lecuona’s compositions were published prior to the embargo, Cuba maintains a stranglehold on all national properties and, therefore one is unable, even in this digital world to truly obtain full access to these manuscripts and publications.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{112} John F Kennedy. Proclamation. “Proclamation 3447–Embargo on all Trade with Cuba.” (February 3, 1962).

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
Figure 21. U.S. President John F. Kennedy’s Embargo on all trade with Cuba
In spite of the difficulties in accessing the prolific output of Lecuona, “performers and audiences relish the inclusion of new and exotic repertoire—songs not included in the most popular anthologies published by the mega “big box” publishers. The art song of Cuba offers exciting unique and distinctive repertoire for singers of all levels, and for their audiences.”\textsuperscript{114} In particular, classically trained singers long to revel in the intricacies of Lecuona’s canciones líricas—as shown in \textit{Malagueña, Siboney, Noche Azul} and \textit{Siempre en Mi Corazón}—where one is able to truly stretch the capacities and range of the trained voice.

\section*{Conclusion}

Ernesto Lecuona, composer of over 600 works and an esteemed concert pianist, loved and cherished his homeland, Cuba, as exhibited throughout his numerous compositions. He turned his home, La Comparsa, into his musical oasis for composing and relaxing in Guanabacoa, near Havana. There he created an environment where both family, musical collaborators, and colleagues could gather to celebrate El Maestro, as he was often called, and rejoice in the Cuban culture.

Lecuona’s worldly, far-reaching mentality, in combination with his extensive travels, provided him with European experiences that would, in turn, influence his song writing and composition. With the stylistic inspiration of classical Europe merging with the tribal Afro-Cuban rhythms, the passionate Latin-American texts and sultry Cuban atmosphere, Lecuona became a master of the Cuban art song.

Draayer sums it up perfectly saying, "Singers dream of Cuba’s sensuous melodies, its fusion of African, European Spanish, and Cuban folk rhythms, and its sultry and coquettish poetry. Because the island is forbidden...we are intrigued and fascinated by its mystery—so close and yet so impossibly far." In composing four of his most famous songs: Malagueña, Siboney, Noche Azul and Siempre en Mi Corazón, he truly epitomized the properties of the Cuban art song style, canciones líricas.

When Ernesto Lecuona’s name is spoken, the Malagueña and Siboney are most certainly among the first songs that come to mind. Their sensuous melodies and classical forms grasping the audience from the onset and enticing them with these island songs. One hopes that Ernesto Lecuona’s charming songs continue to inspire singers and are increasingly included in the classical repertoire.

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References


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