



From the *canción de protesta* to the *nueva trova*, 1965–85¹

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Introduction

Despite its broad impact throughout the hemisphere, surprisingly little of substance has been written about *nueva trova* (new song), the protest music most closely associated with Cuban socialist revolution.² Within the United States, one obstacle has been a lack of funds available for research of any type within Cuba. Another consists of constraints on intellectual freedoms and their effect in turn on publications printed there. Cubans themselves have written a great deal about *nueva trova* since the mid-1970s, but few adopt what would be considered a critical academic perspective.³ The same could be said of most authors in other parts of Latin America and in Spain; their strong identification with the music and/or particular artists tends to bias the content of their work. Even professional researchers encounter problems when attempting to document the history of the movement. Cuban interviewees often refuse to discuss sensitive issues in detail with a visitor from the United States or avoid them entirely if conversations are to be taped. Concern over the professional repercussions of their statements keeps many intellectuals on the island from criticizing government actions in public, even implicitly.

My primary interest in this diverse repertoire concerns the changes in its official status through the years. Cubans are often slow to admit that *nueva trova* began as – and some might say remains – an oppositional youth music that supported some government policies and openly criticized others. During its early development it was known merely as “*canción de protesta*” or “protest song” and provided an alternative perspective on the revolutionary experience for those willing to listen. As a result of their nonconformity, young musicians suffered harassment, blacklisting, and even jailings through about 1971. After that time, however, the government’s attitude toward them began to change. Within a few years they had received dramatically increased exposure through government-controlled media, eventually becoming international symbols of a new Cuban culture.

In the process of reconciliation with the government, the first generation of *nueva trova* artists has generally suppressed their overt political criticisms. While remaining influential, they no longer represent the same constituency or issues as they did in the 1960s, and in their place new generations of singers have emerged. In this essay I explore a few of the concerns of protest singers through the years and how their relationship to the state has fundamentally shaped the content of their work. After a brief discussion of cultural dynamics in socialist Cuba, I describe *nueva trova* music for those unfamiliar with it and its gradual popularization in the 1960s. This section considers the careers of two prominent performers, Pablo Milanés and Silvio Rodríguez, as examples. I then examine the rebellious nature of *nueva trova* artists and their early conflicts with

authorities. Finally, I focus on the processes by which *nueva trova* was transformed from a voice of marginality into a prominent component of institutionalized music making.

Many new forms of music influenced by *nueva trova* have developed in the last 15 years, but I focus on the period from 1965–85 because it represents the stage in which the first generation of performers emerged and achieved their greatest popularity. Information for the essay comes from published sources, recordings, and interviews with artists living in Cuba and in the United States. Interviews in Cuba were gathered during the approximately 18 months I spent in Havana between 1992 and 1995, and on shorter subsequent visits. Most involved relatively informal conversations with musicians, historians, staff at radio stations, and friends. Recent interviews in the United States have been conducted with Cuban exiles living in the Philadelphia area.

A note about socialism and the arts

As in most Marxist–Leninist states, culture and intellectual production have been highly politicized in Cuba. Fidel Castro created a National Culture Advisory in the 1960s, later transformed into the Ministry of Culture, which constantly uses the arts as a means of inspiring nationalist sentiment, unity, and greater dedication to political goals. Government agencies promote songs with overtly political lyrics, incorporate particular composers, performers, and genres into public discourse as symbols of national heritage, and create musical festivals commemorating historical events of the socialist revolution, to mention only a few examples.

Such foregrounding of cultural matters reflects the importance of collective ideological appeals to the cohesion of socialist societies. Material incentives used in capitalist nations to encourage hard work and support of the status quo – bonuses, overtime pay, stock options, vacation packages – tend not to work well under socialism for at least two reasons. First, socialist governments make efforts to provide basic consumer goods to all citizens at affordable prices, but they cannot necessarily offer a wide selection of products or even those of high quality. As a result, money simply is not as useful or valuable and does not serve as a strong motivator. Second, even if it were possible to utilize money as a stimulus, the resulting accumulation of capital and consumer goods by some individuals would place strain on basic Marxist principles of equality and the eradication of class differences.

With their options for economic incentives severely limited, socialist states make greater use of moralist or nationalist messages in their attempts to foster cohesion. In other words, a sense of duty or obligation, the need to do “the right thing” for the good of everyone rather than for individual gain, is often the primary means employed to encourage worker productivity and support of policy. This approach to consensus-building impels the sphere of culture and ideas to the center of any analysis of socialism (Verdery, 1991 :428).

In the United States, artists are allowed to say or create virtually whatever they would like to precisely because the ideas they espouse will have limited impact. In a society that prioritizes profitability and the pursuit of material happiness more than self-reflection about economic values or social justice, for instance, ideas expressed by musicians, poets, and the like simply are not too important. Most citizens go to work each day thinking about the next sports recreational vehicle they would like to buy or the fancy designer outfit on display at Nordstrom’s, and this is what motivates their long hours on the job. Artistic production may be valued in some circles but is ultimately

peripheral to the orientation of capitalist society as a whole. The same could be said of other intellectual pursuits (e.g., philosophy) that produce few if any marketable products.

In socialist Cuba, by contrast, material goods have been relegated to secondary importance and ideas are paramount. Children are taught from their earliest years about the gains of the revolution in the areas of health care, housing, support of the elderly, and education. They are lectured on the importance of personal sacrifice and voluntary social service. As early as age five or six, they are encouraged to take part in “Pioneer” youth activities preparing them for future political involvement and to ponder the ultimate sacrifices of martyrs to socialist ideals.⁴ As they grow older their exposure to political thought increases and permeates nearly every aspect of their lives. Cuban cities are literally covered in slogans printed on walls, billboards, postage stamps, key chains, and T-shirts exhorting citizens to keep Marxist ideals in mind and to continue to struggle for a better common future.⁵

This, then, is the rarefied environment in which Cuban musicians have lived and worked for the past 40 years. The centrality of culture and ideas to the perpetuation of socialism means that artists serve a more directly functional role than those in capitalist countries. They help focus the minds of the public on particular issues and generate sympathy for government programs. They are, more often than not, part of a vanguard that contributes actively to political affairs rather than peripheral or estranged voices in a larger (capitalist) economic process. By the same token, the importance of the arts to socialism means that authorities have a greater interest in regulating its content and that they tend to be less tolerant of views that contradict or threaten the legitimacy of their endeavors.

Nueva trova cannot be understood without considering the turbulent political conditions of much of the developing world in the mid-20th 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. The conflicts also reflected a radicalization of the disenfranchised, a violent struggle for a 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 '60s witnessed land-reform campaigns in Guatemala, leftist guerrilla warfare in Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, and Uruguay, independence movements in Jamaica and Puerto Rico, 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 dictators in Brazil and elsewhere can be viewed as part of this same process, a reaction to the increasing demands of the working classes for political change. Revolution in Cuba is thus far from an isolated occurrence, and in fact members of many constituencies cited above developed their own song repertoires similar to *nueva trova*. It was in this overarching context, beginning in the mid-1960s, that “the political lid came off the pot” as one musician described it (Feliú, 1997, pp. 9–10), and new forms of musical expression emerged to complement new social orders.

All *nueva trova* owes a debt to the efforts of folklorists and musicians in Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay, where protest song first achieved widespread popularity within Latin America. Authors most frequently cite Argentine Atahualpa Yupanqui (Héctor Roberto Chavero, 1908–92) and Chilean Violeta Parra (1918–67) as early influential figures who championed the arts of indigenous peoples and other marginal groups as well as the social issues pertinent to them. The *nueva canción* tradition in South America developed in part out of nationalist reactions to an onslaught of media and 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*, *zampoñas*, *quenas*, *bombos*) and folkloric styles (*huayno*, *milonga*, *zamba*, *chacarera*) largely ignored by the South American mass 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.⁶

9 7 6 16 9 *nueva trova*

Nueva trova is the best known genre of Cuban protest song, but is far from the first. The origins of socially conscious music stretch back in time as far as documentation exists, well over 150 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, pp. 43–45).⁷ Later works by individual *trovador*-artists of the early 20th century included praise of war heroes Antonio Maceo and Máximo Gómez, and outcry over policies of U.S. military intervention, and of foreign control of Cuban farmlands (Mateo Palmer, 1988, pp. 136–167). 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 support and promotion by the government as to any inherent "newness."

Publications from socialist Cuba often suggest that the most direct predecessor of *nueva trova* is *vieja trova*. This is the term 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, p. 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 similarly emphasize the importance of the text and convey emotional messages. Related to *vieja trova* is the "feelin" repertory of the 1950s whose exponents include César Portillo de la Luz, José Antonio Méndez, and Ángel Díaz. It is characterized by intimate, romantic songs employing ample use of modulations and chromaticism, a fusion of the Cuban *canción* or romantic song tradition with influences from North American jazz. Prominent *nueva trova* artists, most notably Pablo Milanés and Martín Rojas, began their careers as interpreters of *feelin*.

Another influence on the musical substance of *nueva trova* comes from traditional Cuban folklore, genres such as the *son* and *música guajira*. As a matter of fact, the first music embraced by government officials as "revolutionary" after 1959 bore little resemblance to the innovative *trova* of younger artists. It sounded instead almost exactly like pre-Revolutionary music, differing only in lyrical content. Older, established figures such as Carlos Puebla (1917–89) and 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*⁸ (e.g., Puebla, 1994). Example 1 is a lyrical excerpt from the *Los Compadres son* composition “Se acabaron los bohíos” (The Rustic Hovels Have Disappeared). It is taken from the final improvised *montuno* section and is sung in traditional call-and-response style with soloist and chorus and punctuated with flourishes on the bongo drum, claves, maracas, guitar, and *tres*.⁹

Example 1. “Se acabarán los bohíos” from *Los Compadres*. Areíto LP # LD-3639.

Havana: EGREM, n.d. [1960s]. Italics indicate choral response.

Una vivienda <i>mi compay</i>	A dwelling place <i>my friend</i>
Un apartamento <i>mi compay</i>	An apartment <i>my friend</i>
Para cada familia <i>mi compay</i>	For every family <i>my friend</i>
En la Sierra Maestra <i>mi compay</i>	In the Sierra Maestra mountains <i>my friend</i>
En toda Cuba <i>mi compay</i>	All across Cuba <i>my friend</i>
Se acabaron los bohíos <i>mi compay</i>	The rustic hovels are disappearing <i>my friend</i>
Con mucho trabajo <i>mi compay</i>	With our hard work <i>my friend</i>
Con la microbrigada <i>mi compay</i>	With the microbrigades <i>my friend</i>
De la construcción <i>mi compay</i>	Helping in the construction <i>my friend</i>
Quedará algún bohío <i>mi compay</i>	Perhaps a few huts will remain <i>my friend</i>
Para el museo <i>mi compay</i>	As museum pieces <i>my friend</i>
En la Sierra Maestra <i>mi compay</i> ...	In the Sierra Maestra mountains <i>my friend</i> ...

While not the most central influence, rural string traditions and *décima* poetry¹⁰ derived from Spain have had a significant impact on *nueva trova* compositions as well. Alfredo Carol, Alberto Faya, Pedro Luis Ferrer, and Lázaro García (the last from Grupo Moncada) are but a few of the *trovadores* known for incorporating such elements into their songs. A tension between the creation of compositions based on traditional genres and others with diverse cosmopolitan influences has characterized *nueva trova* since its inception.

Rock and folk rock music from the United States may 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, a number of first-generation protest artists intended their songs to represent a conscious break with tradition through the incorporation of foreign influences; only as of the 1970s did they begin to draw once again on musical styles from Cuba’s past. Rock performance began in Cuba in the late 1950s with Elvis Presley imitators featured in Havana nightclubs. Early figures who copied U.S. artists include Danny Puga, Jorge Bauer, and Luís Bravo (Manduley López, 1997, pp. 136–138). 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 style (Calzado, 1996). Los Astros, Los Bucaneros, 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 traditional dance music performance, and the departure of prominent *rockeros* as part of the Mariel exodus (Manduley López, 1997, pp. 136–138).

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 own music. Noel Nicola and Vicente Feliú, founding members of the *Movimiento de la Nueva Trova*, began their artistic careers in the mid-1960s playing Elvis and Beatles covers and emulating the numerous rock combos performing in Havana's youth parties such as *Los Gnomos*, *Los Kent*, and *Los Dada* (Díaz Pérez, 1994, p. 43). Nicola's well-known "Para una imaginaria María del Carmen" strikes the listener as more reminiscent of Phil Ochs than of any Cuban musical antecedent, while Silvio Rodríguez's "Oleo de mujer con sombrero" takes its picking style directly from Bob Dylan's "Boots of Spanish Leather."¹¹ Rodríguez, more than any other figure, represents an artist supporting the fusion of foreign musical elements, primarily from the U.S. and Britain, into Cuban popular song.

Since *nueva trova* artists blend many distinct styles, some of the best known pieces do not sound overtly "Cuban" but instead strike the listener as cosmopolitan and eclectic. One might describe *nueva trova* artists as the "culture brokers" of international music trends (Robbins, 1990, p. 435), strongly influenced by foreign pop music and yet invariably changing and personalizing it for specific 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;¹² satirical political commentary by Alejandro "Virulo" García set to recycled fragments of international repertoire such as rococo-style harpsichord excerpts, the Mexican folk song "Cielito lindo," and "The Charleston";¹³ and guitar pieces by Pablo Milanés like "Son de Cuba a Puerto Rico" based on transformations of rhythms associated with Cuban dance music.¹⁴

Lyrics are clearly a central feature of *nueva trova* music, 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 nationally and internationally recognized poets (José Martí,¹⁵ Nicolás Guillén,¹⁶ César Vallejo,¹⁷ Pablo Neruda¹⁸) to the point of imitating their work or setting their poems to music (Acosta & Gómez, 1981, p. 12). 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, p. 174).¹⁹ Many works are overtly political, contemplating the valor of insurgents at Moncada or paying homage to slain labor activists of past decades.²⁰ 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" that 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 another, it has been defined less musically and more by the generation that created it and its meanings for them. Acosta and Gómez (1981, p. 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 ..."²¹ Others place more emphasis on oppositionality, defining the movement as a "culture of contestation" among the young and disenfranchised (Faya, 1995, p. 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. The entire lifestyle and persona of

the protest singer represented a testing of boundaries. By growing hair long, wearing torn “hippie” clothing, performing on sidewalks or at other non-standard venues, and through 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 and learned to value the welfare of the nation as much or more than their own. They were products of the drive to create an “*hombre nuevo*” or idealized “new socialist man.” *Granma*, the official state newspaper, defined the new man as an individual with “a profound consciousness of his role in society and of his duties and social responsibilities, a man capable of constructing Communism and living with it” (Fagen, 1969, p. 17). Visitors to Cuba such as Ernesto Cardenal have noted the profound effects of such education on the young. My own experiences tend to confirm that, regardless of their ultimate acceptance or rejection of socialist philosophy, most Cubans today have been forced to confront a range of issues and have a much higher degree of political awareness than their counterparts in the United States.

In addition to domestic educational changes, protest artists were heavily affected by international social trends of the 1960s. Along with others in Europe and the United States they 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 as teenagers, completed military service after 1964 – and yet did not 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 reasons to feel proud. Perhaps because of this independent attitude, the first artists who began singing protest song in public were referred to disparagingly by Party members as “los conflictivos,” “the troublemakers” (Rodríguez, 1996a, p. 10).²²

For many aspiring performers, the educational opportunities afforded them as part of the Movimiento de Aficionados (Amateurs Movement) proved important to the improvement of their musicianship and their contacts with peers. As with countless other initiatives, the Movimiento de Aficionados is mentioned by everyone who writes about Cuban culture but seriously examined by no one. What is documented is that it began during the earliest years of the revolution as a means by which non-professionals could study the arts, a populist program with broad public support. It seems to have been most influential from 1961 to 1963. Exactly how many individuals took part, what they learned, and when the program ended is unclear. In any case, *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, p. 168). Amateur talent festivals hosted by the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) represented another early performance opportunity, one of the only public spaces available before the musicians received government sponsorship. The informal nature of musical training among *trova* artists is significant since it is one factor that made their music difficult for the establishment to accept initially (Acosta, 1995, p. 375).

Because they have had such a tremendous impact on the early years of the movement and have continued to make a mark as innovative composers even today, some specific 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 performance careers, which have been more thoroughly documented than most, demonstrate the changing relationship between younger artists and the government.

Pablo Milanés, a *mulato* or light-skinned Afrocuban performer, was born in 1943 in Bayamo on the eastern side of Cuba. As is the case of most musicians from Oriente, his first musical experiences involved playing *son* and *vieja trova*; in general his work has been strongly grounded in Cuban folklore and he has consistently promoted the work of traditional entertainers.²³ As a teenager, Milanés was already singing on Cuban television as a result of invitations from José Antonio Méndez and Marta Valdés (Acosta and Gómez, 1981, p. 10). He later performed in dance orchestras in Havana as well as in the Cuarteto del Rey, a group dedicated to interpreting North American spirituals. Milanés's early solo repertoire is noteworthy for its engaging melodies, the influence of jazz harmonization, his adaptation of folkloric rhythms into unique fingerpicking patterns on the guitar, and for straightforward but engaging lyrics discussing intimate relationships, love of country, as well as more 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, 1995, p. 378). He wrote the first piece recognized as *vieja trova* by music historians, "Mis 22 años," in 1965.

If Pablo Milanés is an innovative traditionalist, extending and adapting folkloric genres, Silvio Rodríguez (b. 1946) might be described as an internationalist, patterning his early musical style loosely on songs by Bob Dylan and Paul McCartney. Rodríguez, a Hispanic Cuban, was born in San Antonio de los Baños on the outskirts of Havana. He too performs on the guitar, but more often strumming in a folk rock style. His music is also harmonically complex but typically includes asymmetrical phrases, abrupt key changes, and is sung in a high melodic range. The lyrics of Rodríguez's songs are especially daring, often incorporating surrealist imagery and extended metaphors so that the literal meaning of the text is far from transparent. This performer wrote his first pieces about 1967 while in the military and quickly developed a following. He was the first to achieve limited national recognition as a *trovador* in 1968.

While not absolute, there are distinctions between the admirers of Silvio Rodríguez and Pablo Milanés. Silvio's fans tend more often to be white, highly educated, and cosmopolitan, preferring rock and international pop music over that of Cuban performers. One gets the impression that they subtly associate Cuban dance music and other traditional genres with poorly educated blacks and thus consider them less interesting (Robbins, 1990, p. 440). Pablo's fans, by contrast, are more consistently black or racially mixed, and are more interested in domestic music than styles from abroad.

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 too often to be intolerant of rebellion in others (Nicola in Cardenal, 1974, p. 51). The government has consistently supported progressive positions in terms of its social agenda but has proven conservative in its attitudes towards long hair (worn by men), homosexuality, rights to religious

expression, and other personal liberties, artistic or otherwise. This was especially true in the 1960s, as many *nueva trova* protagonists found to their dismay. They gathered informally whenever they could and shared songs that expressed a new vision of what Cubans should think about and strive toward, and did not fully understand why socialist leaders failed to take an interest in them. Ironically, their questions about the nature and substance of Cuban 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, p. 157) uses the metaphor of an enormous forge to convey a sense of how opposing goals and viewpoints were slowly being fused into a political consensus, often at the expense of those unwilling to conform. Medin (1990, p. 16) describes the country as moving towards “a new, Soviet-oriented phase of orthodoxy,” implementing programs that extended Marxist principles further into the fabric of Cuban society. Whether imposed from abroad or primarily at the insistence of Fidel Castro, such policies resulted in a more intrusive government presence than had existed previously. This was most apparent in the area of economics. Banks, foreign enterprises, and large industries had been nationalized in the earliest years of the revolution, but until 1967 individual entrepreneurs were still allowed to work independently. Beginning with the new “Ofensiva Revolucionaria” of that year, the government outlawed all 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 offensive, one that demonstrated less tolerance towards those believed unwilling to accept Party doctrine. Increasingly, space for diversity of opinion about what Cuban socialism should be was replaced by the suppression of alternate views and a demand for uncompromising adherence to a single position determined ultimately by Castro. Many policy makers of the time could not conceive of promoting youth protest music as part of its political campaigns. 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 in the universities or freedom of the press if it endangered socialist goals, “so there was no need ... for protest songs within the revolution” (Medin, 1990, p. 126).

Fortunately for the *trovadores*, there remained some leaders with the will and the political clout to make their own decisions about how “revolutionary” expression was to be defined. Haydée Santamaría, one of the few survivors of the Moncada garrison attack led by Castro in 1953, had been put in charge of coordinating cultural activities in the newly created Casa de las Américas (Americas House). This institution is devoted to cultural exchange with other Latin American countries. Santamaría, a music lover and admirer of South American protest song, created an early haven for *nueva trova*. She made efforts to expose younger Cubans 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 Festival de la Canción Popular in Varadero (December, 1967; de Juan, 1982, p. 51). For a few months in 1968 she also scheduled regular presentations of *nueva trova* at the Casa de las Américas. Only an individual with the impeccable revolutionary credentials of Santamaría could have challenged the biases of the Party against *nueva trova* at that time.²⁴

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 some members of the *nueva trova*. The title of the show was taken from a Silvio Rodríguez composition that also served as the program's theme song. Guests consisted primarily of well-established figures such as vocalists Elena Burke and Omara Portuondo and poet Guillermo Rodríguez Rivera. Nevertheless, the program soon proved controversial among conservative elements of the ICRT²⁵ because of its inclusion of "hippie" performers. By mid-April, Jorge Seguera and other directors decided to cancel "Mientras Tanto" (Correa, 1987; Díaz Pérez, 1994, pp. 134–137). Apparently they had never liked the idea of featuring protest singers but felt the need to give the Cuban youth a music program that would appeal to them. This was especially urgent since broadcasts of popular U.S. and European rock groups had been condemned by the Party as a form of cultural imperialism and banned completely (Fernández, 1999). A few radio presentations of younger alternative artists aired at Radio Habana Cuba at approximately the same time, organized by Estela Bravo, and in 1968 the Casa de las Américas recorded at least one anthology LP of protest song (Díaz Pérez, 1994, pp. 164–167).

Conflicts with authorities

The reasons for the onset of the revolution's harshest period of ideological repression – what some have referred to as "the grey years" (*los años grises*) – have yet to be fully explored. Beginning in 1968 and continuing through the early 1970s, Cuban artists and intellectuals experienced serious difficulties if they were perceived to deviate in any way from Party positions. Most artists who were professionally active at that time tell horror stories that involve public condemnation of their work, loss of party membership, loss of employment, blacklisting, time served in jail or in "voluntary" labor camps (*granjas de castigo*, literally "punishment farms"),²⁶ and the like. Clearly the so-called grey years represent the worst period of the Cuban revolution in terms of limitations on cultural expression. They are characterized by excessive authoritarianism on the part of the leadership, "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, p. 34; Dumont, 1970, p. 81).

It is possible that economic difficulties and increasing reliance on Soviet aid may have contributed to these changes. Domínguez (1978, pp. 153–159), for instance, 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 all-out attempt to produce 10 million tons of sugar (*la zafra de los diez millones*). 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 invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 also had ideological repercussions in Cuba. Major tensions surfaced in the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) over whether to publicly condemn this act. Ambivalent themselves, Castro and other members of the Central Committee eventually chose to endorse the invasion in order to keep receiving economic aid. Among the many prominent figures who had spoken out against it, 43 were arrested, 9 expelled from the Party, and 26 imprisoned before the year ended (Domínguez, 1978, p. 162).

The government's increasing unwillingness to tolerate internal criticism also derives from tense international relations. During the 1960s the CIA made numerous attempts

to destabilize the new socialist government and to assassinate Castro (Senate, 1976, pp. 2–6). Beginning at that time the same agency covertly organized and/or aided as many as 300 counter-revolutionary groups (Stubbs, 1989, p. 87). And ever since the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, right-wing members of the Cuban community in Miami have attempted bombings of Cuban civilian airplanes and businesses, the assassination of diplomats, and even commando terrorist raids on the island itself (Oppenheimer, 1992, p. 325; Senate, 1976, p. 11; Smith, 1987, pp. 98, 160; Stubbs, 1989, p. xv). All of these events have led to the development of a “siege mentality” among leaders who view themselves (justifiably) as surrounded by hostile forces.²⁷ They insist that the country must remain unified, and that no internal division or criticism can be permitted until such aggression ends.

Though the Cuban leadership of the late 1960s remained concerned about counter-revolutionary activities, they came to view military invasion of the island as a less likely option as time went on.²⁸ In place of this concern, they instead focused on culture and the media, the most central sites of future conflicts with the capitalist world. As part of a new ideological offensive they began to condemn everything associated with the United States and Western Europe as bastardized or contaminated (Arias, 1982, p. 28); this is the period that witnessed the censorship of virtually all rock, jazz, and other North American music from radio and television. In a speech from 1980, Castro verbalized many of the attitudes towards 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 difficultiesWe 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 colonialismIt is a long struggle and we are still engaged in it. (Castro in Medin, 1990, p. 17)

The cultural offensive of the late 1960s affected every sphere of cultural activity, but policy makers paid special attention to rock music given its centrality to youth culture at the time. Rock was viewed as implicitly subversive on many levels: because of its associations with the “decadent” ways of the United States and other capitalist countries, because of its English lyrics, because of its association with alternative dress and lifestyles that did not conform to revolutionary norms. Policy makers viewed rock as transcending sound and embodying an entire way of life that often resulted in an unwillingness to integrate into the revolutionary process (Cristóbal Sosa, radio journalist, interview, October 1, 1996, El Vedado, Havana). At times they banned even older and relatively “tame” rockers such as Little Richard from the radio for this reason. To the Party leadership, the implicit aesthetic of all rock with its emphasis on the transgression of boundaries, physical gratification and/or 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 socialist policy. Any demonstrable affiliation with the movement implied “desviaciones ideológicas” (ideological drift), the taint of the Yankees.

By the late 1960s, a climate of fear had permeated the entire intellectual community, young and old, as a result of widespread censorship and surveillance by representatives of the Interior Ministry. The extent of new limitations on the exchange of ideas first surfaced during the Congreso Cultural de La Habana in January of 1968 and was most apparent in discourses surrounding the Congreso de Educación y Cultura in 1971 (Alberto, 1996, p. 33). Artists found that in many instances they could no longer voice their true opinions; as a result they began to “auto-censure” themselves, avoiding controversial issues and choosing “safer” subjects in an attempt to protect themselves (Tomás Fernández Robaina, interviews, August 31 and September 25, 1996, Atarés, Havana, and November 21, December 11 and January 10, Chicago, Illinois; Golendorf, 1977, p. 109). Such problems, which continue to a lesser extent today, first became widespread during the *años grises*.

The internment of Cuban youth judged unsupportive of the country’s socialist agenda seems to have occurred on a massive scale in the late 1960s and early 1970s. No reliable statistics exist, but one interviewee told Ernesto Cardenal that as many as 500,000 had been detained 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, p. 50). This astounding figure has been supported by some of my interviews with Cuban exiles; poet and composer Reynaldo Fernández, for instance, estimates that about one-third of the adult male population spent at least brief periods in detention at this time, lasting from a few hours to weeks or months (Fernández, 1998). Sentences included manual labor in the countryside, prison, or assignment to “reeducation camps.” Yet another potential destination was the “*minas del frío*,” nickel mines, in Escambray. Many non-conformist students served time there including Pablo Cabañino, the painter who designed the covers of several early *nueva trova* albums (*ibid.*). The year 1969 marked the peak of police activity concentrating on younger Cubans, probably because of concern over the outcome of the mammoth sugar harvest (Cristóbal Sosa, radio journalist, interview, October 1, 1996, El Vedado, Havana).

Because of the rebelliousness and non-conformity of protest singers, they experienced frequent difficulties with the authorities. Pablo Milanés, one of the first to be jailed, suffered an especially harsh sentence. The circumstances leading to his arrest remain unclear, and may or may not have had to do with his song writing. In approximately 1968²⁹ officials accused him of being a homosexual and sentenced him to an UMAP³⁰ prison in Camagüey, where he remained for over a year (Leonardo Acosta, interview on September 1, 1996, El Vedado, Havana; Radamés Giro, interview in his home, June 22, 1997, Marianao, Havana; Golendorf, 1977:48).³¹ One punishment to which at least some prisoners in the camp were subjected during their first days of captivity is said to have involved being buried up to their necks in the ground (Fernández, 1998, 1999). While this particular anecdote is unsubstantiated, the excesses of Cuban socialists as regards their treatment of suspected homosexuals (e.g., Lumsden, 1996) and political prisoners (Clark, 1992) in the 1960s are well documented. 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 in the late 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 resulted in Milanés’s release and return to Havana (Fernández, 1998).

Many other musicians experienced similar, albeit less extreme, difficulties. Docu-

mentation 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 problems with the police and media officials beginning in 1967. According to one source he dedicated the piece “Te doy una canción” to the daughter of a prominent military leader who did not approve of Rodríguez and who later took it upon himself to impede the artist’s career (Cristóbal Sosa, radio journalist, interview, November 12, 1997, Centro Habana, Havana). Rodríguez exacerbated such tensions with his argumentative nature, the decision to get a tattoo, to wear hippie clothing, and by making statements about the importance of foreign rock groups on his musical development (*ibid.*). 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 were lectured on the importance of fuller integration into the revolution (Helio Orovio, interview, September 26, El Vedado, Havana. “P.P.” [staff writer]). 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, nowhere to turn. At this point the composer accepted a manual labor job working on a fishing boat named after the Playa Girón, site of the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. His voyage on this 94-meter craft with 100 other young men began in September of 1969 and lasted through January of 1970 (Rodríguez, 1996, p. 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. The performer notes in recent publications that during the year or two prior to leaving on the boat the “thread” on which his professional existence hung “had become dangerously tense” (*ibid.*, p. 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” (*ibid.*, p. 12).³² Surprisingly, the months aboard the Playa Girón proved incredibly productive for Silvio from a musical standpoint. Many of his most beautiful and internationally renowned compositions, including several that openly challenge the government, were written at sea.³³

Conditions began to improve dramatically for younger musicians beginning only a few years later, and yet more subtle problems persisted that directly impacted their music. Those in charge of radio programming allowed them only limited access to the mass media for many years. Representatives of the National Culture Advisory (CNC) and the Ministry of the Interior continued to closely monitor the ideological content of their song lyrics. They regularly prohibited controversial pieces from being recorded or aired and sent police to public concerts to ensure that they were not performed live (Oppenheimer, 1992, p. 265). Even today, artists with a history of oppositional compositions often find themselves blacklisted, jailed for short periods, or professionally marginalized. “Suspect” performers may be allowed to schedule an occasional concert, but nearly all tickets will be presold to Communist Party members so that other “impressionable” listeners cannot attend (Alexis Esquivel, visual artist, interviews, September 21 and 22, 1996, El Vedado, Havana).

It should be clear by now that the protest song movement gained popularity in initial years not because of government policy, but in spite of it. Castro himself nearly admitted as much in remarks made at a youth meeting 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...” (Castro in Díaz Pérez,

1994, p. 131). Nevertheless, the sudden prominence of artists Vicente Feliú, Sara González, Noel Nicola, Pablo Milanés and Silvio Rodríguez and the nationwide promotion of younger artists is due to a radical shift in policy. In the space of only a few years, protest song moved from the margin to the mainstream of socialist music making. Its proponents were heralded as prized cultural products and spokespersons of the revolutionary experience rather than as insolent malcontents.

The MNT and institutionalization

The first government organization that offered employment to *trovadores* and allowed them to produce music for the revolution as professionals was the ICAIC,³⁴ the primary producer of domestic films. Under the direction of classically trained composer and guitarist Leo Brouwer, the ICAIC established a working group of young artists with the intention of training them and letting them help create film scores. The members, known collectively as the Grupo de Experimentación Sonora or Sonic Experimentation Group (GES), first assembled in 1969 and continued working with various changes of personnel through 1978. Musicians involved at some point during these years include Pablo Milanés, Noel Nicola, Silvio Rodríguez, Sara González, Eduardo Ramos, and American ex-patriot Pablo Menéndez, as well as several classically trained artists (Orovio, 1981, p. 137). Under Brouwer's instruction, a number of the musicians 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.³⁵ It is important to realize that the formation of the GES did not imply broad acceptance of *nueva trova* music, but rather a truce or compromise between younger performers and the government. It offered performers a creative outlet, but not on their own terms. Silvio Rodríguez notes that Alfredo Guevara, the founder and president of the ICAIC for many years, 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, 1996a, p. 11).³⁶ 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 visible and respectable and still had time to compose music of their own choosing.

The desire for close political relations with the government of Chilean Salvador Allende and other Latin American countries undoubtedly contributed to the gradual acceptance of protest song within Cuba. A similar movement gained widespread recognition half a dozen years earlier in Chile than in Cuba and was already an organized political force by 1969 (Morris, 1986, p. 121). Cuban singers had firsthand exposure to their counterparts in South America because the Consejo Nacional de Cultura began sponsoring pan-Latin American festivals in Havana as early as 1965 (Díaz Pérez 1994, p. 85). This was apparently part of an attempt to establish closer ties and generate sympathy for socialist issues. By 1971 Víctor Jara had been invited to perform in the Casa de las Américas; others visiting in subsequent years included Daniel Viglietti, Isabel and Angel Parra, Tania Libertad, and the group Inti Illimani (Díaz Ayala, 1981, p. 310; Díaz Pérez, 1994, p. 229).

The years 1971 and 1972 represent a pivotal moment in official reevaluation of *canción de protesta*. With ever greater frequency, the state invited artists to take part in international music festivals throughout Latin America, Spain, and Soviet Bloc countries as representatives of Cuban youth. 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. Acoustic *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 and were given more national airplay. In a short time, pieces by Silvio Rodríguez and others that had been considered counterrevolutionary were in the process of becoming the unofficial national anthems of the country (Correa, 1987).

The peak years of *nueva trova*'s popularity, as well as that of protest song in many other Latin American countries, extend from 1972 through approximately 1985. During this time *trova* became the principal form of government-sponsored music targeted at younger domestic audiences. It should be remembered that the term "*nueva trova*" achieved widespread recognition only in the 1970s (Nicola, 1995, p. 365). The very label can be viewed as a move by authorities to link what many considered a deviant form of youth expression to Cuban artists and genres of the past, and in this way to take away some of its oppositionality. Calling *rockeros* like Vicente and Santiago Feliú *trovadores* linked them discursively to Sindo Garay and Alberto Villalón, staunch supporters of the Communist Party whose compositions had never been controversial. It obscured the fact that *canción de protesta* actually represented a form of counter-culture heavily influenced from abroad.

By 1973 authorities had institutionalized the Movimiento Nacional de la Trova (MNT) and given it government oversight complete with a national registry of members, a board of directors, and centers for performance in every province. 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") in Havana, Freddy Laborí ("Chispa") as well as Augusto Blanca in Oriente, and the groups Canto Libre (based in Camagüey), Manguaré (specializing in South American instruments), Mayohuacán, Moncada, Nuestra América (Matanzas), and others. 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 clumsy attempts to dictate the content of *nueva trova* composition with disappointing results (Díaz Pérez, 1994, p. 22). They also maintained the right to suppress songs deemed inappropriate or potentially subversive such as Pablo Milanés's "La vida no vale nada" (Life is Worth Nothing).³⁷

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 studio time and facilitated the dissemination of their work. One begins to find much more elaborated compositions on the market as of the mid-1970s; solo guitar pieces are still heard, but contrast increasingly with others incorporating synthesizer, electronic special effects, instruments such as the piano or violin, formally scored arrangements for larger groups, collaborative recordings featuring *trova* artists with other national and international performers and their groups, etc.

Lyrically, *nueva trova* repertoire began to change in subtle ways as well. During the 1960s, *trovadores* freely wrote about virtually any subject they cared to with little concern for its relationship to Party doctrine. Because they had been given no formal recognition or access to the media, they performed largely among themselves; their compositions never represented a significant threat to the establishment. After 1972 this situation began to change. Musicians suddenly found themselves in the spotlight, invited to

receptions by the president of the UNEAC,³⁸ greeted personally by members of the Central Committee and even Castro himself as they returned home from tours, 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.

Established *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 common³⁹ and are overshadowed by other themes: adaptations of traditional *trova* or other folkloric texts; references to figures from Cuba's long revolutionary struggle; nationalism; commentary on international politics; or on personal relationships. Pablo Milanés wrote "Amo esta isla" in 1980 in response to the Mariel crisis, as one example. It represented a muted call to stay on the island and support the revolution (González Portal 1997, p. 7). The case of Silvio Rodríguez is more difficult to evaluate since his texts are so highly metaphorical. One might suggest that it is their very ambiguity that has enabled his songs to escape censorship while still being read as subversive by many fans.

Journalist Cristóbal Sosa suggests that the political pressures facing *nueva trova* artists as of the mid-1970s are similar to those facing all artists and intellectuals in Cuba. Cultural representatives are all expected to 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 Party]. 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, (Cristóbal Sosa, radio journalist, interview, October 1, 1996, El Vedado, Havana)⁴⁰

Without necessarily intending to, Pablo Milanés and Silvio Rodríguez have now become *nueva trova* superstars who generate tremendous sympathy and revenue for the Communist Party. In recognition of their contributions to the revolution (and in order to make sure they will not leave the country), the government has given them large houses with pools, domestic help, cars with chauffeurs, access to foreign currency, free license to travel abroad, the right to establish their own artistic foundations with access to royalty revenues, and other perks – all of this in a country in which many families still live on inadequate rations of rice and beans and cannot 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 consideration, but their new status compromises their ability to act as a "voice of protest."

Milanés, Rodríguez, and other *trovadores* of the same generation (e.g., Eduardo Ramos, Tony Pinelli, Jorge Gómez) have additionally been accused of involvement in acts of repudiation in the 1980s against artists intending to leave the country (Correa 1987).⁴¹ Whether or not these accounts are true, those who came of age listening to *trova* of the late 1960s and early 1970s frequently feel as if the artists who remain popular

today have “sold out” to the authorities. This feeling is especially strong in conjunction with Silvio Rodríguez who established himself early on as a musical rebel willing to risk censure in order to speak his mind. The government “uses two methods,” suggests one Cuban exile living in Miami: “either they censure you or assimilate you. In the case of Silvio they assimilated him. Silvio’s music was prohibited, now it’s obligatory” (ibid.). Much of Rodríguez’s music does receive strong government support and promotion, and fewer of his recent compositions contain controversial lyrics than in past years. Even so, his older works continue to be performed and retain a degree of oppositionality. To the extent that pieces from the 1990s address pressing social issues (e.g., prostitution, crime) they tend to be marketed for foreign audiences, receiving little or no air play within Cuba.⁴²

Passing the mantle of protest

By the mid-1980s, *nueva trova* artists associated with the early years of the movement had become less attractive to younger listeners. This decline in popularity has various causes but stems most directly from the changing social meanings and functions of their music. In the minds of the youth, middle-aged *trovadores* represent the establishment, not the voice of an outsider with a fresh perspective. Generational differences have played a role; younger fans often prefer artists of their own age who share more of their experiences and perspective. The government’s greater support for dance music beginning in the mid-1980s, as well as of rock music and the resulting proliferation of new bands, has meant that more musical alternatives are available than in previous decades. Finally, the beginnings of *perestroika* and the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union led to a global crisis of socialist thought and widespread political disillusionment in Cuba. Songs inspired by the martyrs of Moncada ring hollow in an era of political uncertainty. In large part, the mantle of Alberto Faya’s “culture of contestation” has passed from folk protest singers to a newer generation of *rockeros* and rap artists. Most of them receive little government recognition and now occupy marginal social positions similar to those once held by the *trovadores*.

A few singers from the 1970s defy this tendency and have continued to write controversial music. As a result they are rarely able to record or perform; only through networks of underground home recording and informal concerts do their works continue to be disseminated. Pedro Luis Ferrer (b. 1952) represents one of the best known; he has gained a following for both his musicianship and his penchant for insightful social critique. He also stands out because of his promotion of traditional genres such as the *guaracha* at a time when many consider folkloric forms passé. According to one Spanish journalist, Ferrer’s music contrasts sharply with that of the “establishment *trovador*” typically present at official functions (P.P. 1994, p. 42). Denounced as a counter-revolutionary by some, he 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 the music of others. Whether joking or serious, he voices concern about prostitution, religious intolerance, prejudice against Afrocuban traditions, homophobia, restraints on freedom of expression and the freedom to travel, and the need for political reform. Two of his best-known compositions from the late 1980s are “100 % cubano” (100 % Cuban) and “El abuelo Paco” (Grandfather Paco; see Ferrer, 1994). The first draws attention to special privileges afforded tourists and

foreigners, emphasizing that Cubans themselves have too frequently become second-class citizens in their own country. The second likens Castro to an irritable old man who builds his family a lovely house to live in and then lords over them using implicit threats of violence.

Excerpt, “El abuelo Paco”

Ten paciencia con abuelo	Be patient w/ grandpa
Recuerda bien cuanto hizo	Remember how much he's done
No contradigas su afán	Don't contradict his enthusiasm
Pónle atención en su juicio	Pay attention to his views
Gasta un poco de tu tiempo	Spend a little time
Complaciendo su egoísmo	Flattering his ego
No olvides que Abuelo tiene	Don't forget that gramps has
Un revólver y un cuchillo	A revolver and a knife
Y mientras no se lo quiten	And as long as they're not taken away
Abuelo ofrece peligro	He poses a threat
Aunque sepas que no, díle que sí	Even if you know the answer is no, say yes
Si lo contradices, peor para tí	If you contradict him, it will go badly for you

Not surprisingly, the last time EGREM⁴³ allowed Ferrer to produce a record was over 15 years ago;⁴⁴ he made the album containing “El abuelo Paco” independently in Miami with the help of his brother during a brief visit there. Authorities continue to censor many of his songs and will not allow his infrequent live concerts to be taped. Ferrer is aware of the price of his 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).

Despite gradually improving economic conditions of the late 1990s, younger Cubans still have few attractive job opportunities, few possibilities for travel or study abroad, and limited access even to clothing, food, or domestic goods. The loss of billion-dollar aid payments from the Soviet Union in 1989 has created “a mass of educated youths whose expectations [clash] sharply with Cuba's desperate conditions” (Oppenheimer, 1992, p. 263). Dissatisfaction with domestic life has led to an even stronger interest in foreign rather than national music. This appeal reflects a rejection of many cultural issues and music genres supported by the Communist Party. As of the early 1990s, for example, Che Guevara's grandson Canek had become a heavy metal rocker whose favorite groups included Slayer, Death, and Kreator (Oppenheimer, 1992, p. 267). He and others have used rock as a symbolic tie to an international artistic community they are separated from, and as a reaction to government policies they still consider too constraining.

Since *nueva trova* began as a fusion of foreign and national influences, it is not surprising that the musical voices of young critics continue to find inspiration abroad. Beginning in the late 1970s with the emergence of the award-winning fusion group Síntesis, continuing in the 1980s with heavy metal bands Venus, Zeus, and Metal Oscuro, and in the 1990s with Carlos Varela and Gerardo Alfonso, electrified rock has come to play an ever more prominent role in the musical expression of *trovadores*. Since about 1986 the state has gradually begun to accept rock performers as professionals and to promote their concerts (Manduley López, 1997, p. 138). More recently, rap music too has influenced national music making, especially among younger Afrocubans.

Several new groups (Anónimo Consejo, Alto y Bajo, Instinto) have signed recording contracts and are now receiving widespread promotion (Sokol, 2000). It is no longer primarily soloists with an acoustic guitar, but these individuals and groups who serve as Cuba's musical conscience.

One ironic result of these changes is that the most widespread support for first-generation *trovadores* may now be among non-Cubans in other countries rather than at home. For the politically conscious youth of the 1970s and 1980s who grew up in the Caribbean, Central and South America, and Spain, the Cuban revolution represented a symbol of their own aspirations; it demonstrated that grassroots activism could accomplish significant change. This public avidly listened to Cuban *trovadores*, performed their songs, and used them as a model to promote progressive musical activity in their own countries. For those unfamiliar with day-to-day Cuban realities, the meaning of the original *nueva trova* music remains largely the same today as it did when it was first written. Silvio Rodríguez, for example, performed in March of 1997 to an ecstatic crowd of 30,000 in San Juan, Puerto Rico, his first show there since the mid-1980s (Martínez Tabares, 1987, p. 6). Commentators noted that he, as well as Puerto Ricans Roy Brown, Andrés Jiménez, and others, evokes 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 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, p. 334). This commentary is provocative, but seems to be contradicted in part by the history of *nueva trova* in Cuba. It is true that the mass institutionalization of *trova* ultimately led to greater regulation of its ideological content and its eventual declining popularity among many listeners. However, at the time it was initially accepted the music represented a very popular form of expression and continued to be supported by listeners for some time. I would argue further that the ideals of socialism as perceived by Cuban youths have been reflected in *nueva trova* composition, and very effectively. The problem is only that policy makers within the Communist Party have not always been accepting of such views. *Trovadores* consistently support government positions they consider beneficial at the same time that they question others. Their songs reflect the attitudes of those who not only contemplate socialism in the abstract but have lived it as a daily reality their entire lives, and thus should be taken seriously. Perhaps the critiques of younger musicians will receive more immediate consideration in policy making of the future and can contribute to a more inclusive and dynamic socialist reality.

Resumen de noticias/Review of Events

Silvio Rodríguez

Note: This piece dates from January of 1970 and was one of dozens written while the author was worked aboard the fishing boat Playa Girón. It is intended as an example of the sort of song considered subversive at the time, and that retains associations with

anti-authoritarianism. Many themes are evident in the lyrics including feelings of marginalization and persecution, and the importance of being true to one's conscience no matter what the cost.

He estado al alcance de todos los bolsillos
 porque no cuesta nada mirarse para adentro
 He estado al alcance de todas las manos
 que han querido tocar mi mano amigamente

Pero, pobre de mí, no he estado con los presos
 de su propia cabeza acomodada
 No he estado en los que ríen con sólo media
 risa
 los delimitadores de las primaveras

No he estado en los archivos ni en las
 papelerías
 y se me archiva en copias y no en originales
 No he estado en los mercados grandes
 de la palabra pero he dicho lo mío
 a tiempo y sonriente

No he estado enumerando las manchas en el sol
 pues sé que en una sola mancha cabe el mundo
 He procurado ser un gran mortificador
 para, si mortifico, no vayan a acusarme

Aunque se dice que me sobran enemigos
 todo el mundo me escucha
 bien quedo cuando canto
 Yo he preferido hablar de cosas imposibles
 porque de lo posible se sabe demasiado

He preferido el polvo así, sencillamente
 pues la palabra amor aún me suena a hueco
 He preferido un golpe así, de vez en cuando
 porque la inmunidad me carcome los huesos

Agradezco la participación de todos
 los que colaboraron con esta melodía
 Se debe subrayar la importante tarea
 de los persiguidores de cualquier nacimiento

Si alguien que me escucha se viera retratado
 sépase que se hace con ese destino
 Cualquier reclamación, que sea sin membrete
 Buenas noches, amigos y enemigos

I have always offered the money in my pockets
 Because self-reflection costs nothing
 I have always been open to any hands
 that have wanted to shake my own cordially

But, poor me, I have not spent time with the
 prisoners of their own pampered minds
 I haven't been with those who only smile a little
 those that control, limit the springtime

I have not been in archives or paper shops
 that file me away in copies, not originals
 I have never been in the grand markets
 of words and writing, but I have said
 what I had to quickly and with a smile

I have not been counting sun blotches because
 I know that the whole world fits inside only one
 I've endeavored to be known as a great
 mortifier
 so that, if I mortify, no one can accuse me of it

Though it is said that I have many enemies
 everyone listens to me
 quietly when I sing
 I have preferred to sing of impossible things
 because of the possible too much is known

I have preferred the dust in its simplicity
 because the word love still rings hollow to me
 I have preferred to take a blow once in a while
 because immunity eats away at my bones

I am thankful for the participation of everyone
 who collaborated in this melody
 The role of all forms of persecutors
 should be recognized for its importance

If someone hears themselves described here
 know that the song was made with that aim
 Any complaints, let them be direct, to the point
 Good night, friends and enemies

Notes

1. My thanks to the Rockefeller Foundation for funds allowing for research related to this topic during the 1996–97 academic year.

2. "*Trova*" in Cuba, derived from "*trovador*" or "troubador," is the term used to refer to the national repertory of traditional song. "*Nueva trova*" has been used since the early 1970s to refer to songs based in part on older styles but written during the socialist

3. Some of the better studies from Cuba include Acosta (1981) and especially Díaz Pérez (1994).

4. The complete name of this children's organization is the Unión de Pioneros de Cuba (UPC). Their motto is: "¡Pioneros por el comunismo, seremos como el Che!" ("Pioneers for communism, let's all be like Che!"). "Che," of course, refers to Ernesto "Che" Guevara, the Argentine revolutionary who fought with Fidel Castro in the 1950s and later died trying to start a new revolution in Bolivia.

5. Typical slogans include “Socialism or death,” “We will be victorious,” or “Join in” (*sumate*). In the context of ongoing economic difficulties and widespread doubt about the substance and value of Cuban socialism today, these slogans may attest more to the desperation of socialist leaders and the difficulty of building consensus around Marxist principles rather than the actual views of the people. I am reminded of Gramsci’s observation that discourses of political unity appear most often in nation-states that are the weakest and most fragmented.

6. For information on *nova música popular brasileira*, see Carrasco Pirard (1982, p. 600); see Díaz Pérez (1994, pp. 113–115) for an overview of protest song movements in Mexico, Venezuela, and Puerto Rico and Díaz Ayala (1981, p. 302) for discussion of Catalanian artists Raimón and Juan Manuel Serrat.

7. The *teatro vernáculo* or comic theater was essentially a form of vaudeville entertainment influenced by Spanish theatrical traditions as well as by U.S. minstrelsy. Short *sainetes* or one-act plays alternated on stage with song.

8. Rural dance music forms from eastern Cuba and smaller towns in the middle of the island.

9. A small guitar-like instrument used to play melodies rather than to strum.

10. A ten-line poetic form derived from Renaissance Spain that continues to be used in Cuban *música guajira* or white/Hispanic country music.

11. The Nicola selection can be heard on Costales and Pinelli (1993), the Rodríguez selection on Rodríguez (1978).

12. See *Nueva trova: selección de éxitos*. Artex compact disc #CD-075. Havana/Canada: EGREM, 1993.

13. Alejandro García (“Virulo”), *La historia de Cuba*. Havana: EGREM LP #LD-3741.

14. Pablo Milanés, *Cantautor: No me pidas* (1977). Universal Music CD #LATD-40082. Mexico, 1997.

15. A Cuban lawyer, essayist, and revolutionary activist who was killed in the final War of Independence against Spain (1895–98).

16. Considered Cuba’s national poet, Guillén (1902–89), an Afrocuban, is most famous for his work of the 1930s. In it he was one of the first to incorporate serious racial themes and issues, as well as black working-class slang into published poetry.

17. A Peruvian poet (1892–1938) of mixed Indian and European descent known for writing about human suffering and the fate of the poor.

18. Chilean, one of the most widely celebrated Latin American poets of all time and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971. His open support of socialist issues is evident in later works such as *Tercera residencia* from 1947 and *Canto general* from 1950.

19. One consistent goal of the Cuban revolution has been the greater integration of women into university programs, white-collar professions, politics, and other facets of society. The creation of the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (Federation of Cuban Women) represents one important example of dedication to this cause. Gradual shifts in the representation of women and romantic relationships in popular song result in large part from nationwide attempts to confront sexism through related education campaigns.

20. The specific examples I am referring to here are: “El programa del Moncada” and “Girón: la victoria” by Sara González and “A Lázaro Peña” by Martín Rojas.

21. “un fenómeno surgido entre las generaciones más jóvenes ... una ruptura deliberada con la producción inmediatamente anterior y una cierta ‘vuelta a las raíces’ combinada con aires renovadores; y por último ... una toma de conciencia política y social ...”

22. Although this analysis focuses on music, it should be noted that younger Cubans left their mark in many artistic fields of the 1960s including film, dance, poetry, and prose. Examples include the films of Sara Gómez.

23. In the 1980s, for instance, Milanés produced a series of albums entitled *Años* with Luis Peña and others that featured works from eastern Cuba written in the 1910s and 1920s. In more recent years he has furthered the careers of Afrocuban drumming ensembles such as Yoruba Andabo, inviting them on tour and securing recording contracts for them.

24. Reynaldo Fernández (personal communication) notes that the Festivals of Popular Song were discontinued after a few years because rock and other song styles from capitalist countries had become too popular among participants – the Communist Party condemned the music as a form of cultural imperialism. The same festivals later reappeared in the 1980s.

25. Instituto Cubano de Radio y Televisión (Cuban Institute of Radio and Television).

26. The *granjas* might be considered a voluntary form of punishment in that individuals were requested to remain there for an unspecified period of time with the understanding that if they served their time there they could come back to their job and continue life as before. If they chose not to go, however, they would lose their job and all professional affiliations. An aside: friends have remarked jokingly to me that Cuba is the only country in which dirt cleans you up instead of making you dirty. The implication here is that physical labor in the countryside has the ability to cleanse the perceived stains on one’s ideological record.

27. Considering the extent of the U.S. embargo against Cuba, one could argue that the country has been literally besieged for nearly 40 years.

28. Fears of invasion were lessened in part by statements from U.S. administrations of the period suggesting that they did not plan to invade. Additionally, the size and resources of the Cuban military had grown considerably since 1959, creating a strong deterrent.

29. No specific dates or other information have ever been published about the arrest. In fact, given the countless books written about this artist it is dumbfounding to realize that not one, to my knowledge, even

mentions the fact that he served prison time! I base my assumption of 1968 on the fact that histories of the *nueva trova* movement (e.g. Díaz Pérez, 1994) fail to discuss Milanés's activities during that year, and because it was virtually the only year he did not compose new music (González Portal, 1997, pp. 7–8).

30. Unidades Militares para la Ayuda a la Producción (Military Units to Aid in Production). These were concentration camps in which inmates were subjected to harsh living conditions and required to perform hard labor for the duration of their sentences. The UMAPs existed for only a short time, from about 1965 to 1968; inmates consisted primarily of homosexuals, religious figures, and dissidents. Major international outcry over the existence of the UMAPs and letters of protest by renowned socialist figures such as Jean Paul Sartre eventually led to their disbanding (Leonardo Acosta, interview, September 1, 1996, El Vedado, Havana).

31. Again, to my knowledge no detailed account of this episode has ever been published, and few references exist to it at all.

32. "... los dirigentes que decían una cosa y hacían otra, los cuadrados, los que desconfiaban de los jóvenes, los acomodados, los enemigos de la cultura, los asentidores y medrosos que echaban a perder la Revolución que yo llevaba dentro ..."

33. Compositions that date from this period include "Debo partirme en dos" in which one finds open references to conflicts with those in authority, as well as to artistic censorship; "Ojalá," a veiled challenge to the political leadership, said to have been dedicated to an officer associated with Silvio's military service or possibly to Castro himself; the more openly autobiographical "Playa Girón" exhorting members of the crew to write their own histories rather than accept those imposed upon them, and "Resumen de noticias," a declaration of artistic principles intended for friends and enemies alike. These songs and many others have been collected by the author himself in *Canciones del mar* (Madrid: Ojalá Ediciones, 1996). The lyrics are open to interpretation in some cases, but Cubans I spoke with consider them to have been written with controversial, even "seditious" intent, inspired by problems with officials and Party members. For a complete example of the lyrics, see the translation of "Resumen de noticias" following this essay.

34. Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográfico, or Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industries.

35. Díaz Pérez (1994, p. 200) provides a list of some of the documentaries and films featuring incidental music composed by this group.

36. Guevara, as a homosexual, has had his share of conflicts with authorities. Possibly for this reason he was more sensitive to the marginalization of younger singers and desirous of offering them support.

37. Apparently policy makers took issue with the suggestion that life could ever be "worth nothing" in a progressive socialist society such as Cuba, though Milanés's lyrics do not directly imply that.

38. Unión de Artistas y Escritores Cubanos (Union of Cuban Artists and Writers).

39. I am thinking about pieces such as Noel Nicola's "A Small Housing Problem" mentioned by Ernesto Cardenal (1974, pp. 154–155) or Rodríguez's "Debo partirme en dos" (Rodríguez, 1996a, p. 154). It is difficult to fully document this trend because most controversial pieces written since the 1960s were never recorded or disseminated.

40. "Aquí hay un instituto de la música y tienes que estar de acuerdo con ese instituto para hacer muchas cosas. Está por otra parte la UNEAC que también tiene sus reglas. Perteneces a la UNEAC pero no puedes hacer todo lo que quieras. O sea, adoptar posiciones independientes fuera de toda la línea. Cuando hay un acontecimiento importante de la cultura que se considere contrario a los intereses de la Revolución, se hacen llamamientos en la UNEAC para que los intelectuales vayan y firmen en contra de eso, como por ejemplo la Helms-Burton."

The Helms–Burton legislation, passed in 1996 with the support of Republican Jesse Helms and other senior congressmen, represents an attempt to intensify the Cuban trade embargo. It allows punitive actions to be brought against businesses in third countries that occupy property owned prior to 1959 by U.S. businesses.

41. "Acts of repudiation" in Cuba are a form of public condemnation against those who have conspired against the revolutionary cause, or are accused of doing so. They were especially common during the Mariel exodus in 1980 – those choosing to leave were considered traitors – but continue to occur occasionally even today. Typically, a small group of neighbors or acquaintances of the individual(s) to be repudiated gather together and begin shouting insults at them outside their home. Sometimes the events consist only of verbal abuse together with a little pounding and kicking at the front door. In more extreme cases, victims have been dragged from their homes, beaten, and/or forced to humiliate themselves in various ways (e.g., to eat their own subversive manuscripts).

42. I base this conclusion on the fact that potentially controversial songs ("Paladar," "Reino de todavía") from his recent *Domínguez* release (Rodríguez, 1996b) are sold in dollar stores within Cuba but are largely unknown to the (?).

43. Empresa de Grabaciones y Ediciones Musicales (Agency of Recordings and Musical Editions). Initially directed by Medardo Montero, this is the state company that oversees all music recording and distribution in socialist Cuba. It was established in 1962.

44. Ferrer's early releases have been made available once again in recent years, but only in CD format for the international tourist market.

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