

Maestro Electo Silva Gainza Passes Away

Digna Guerra, choral composer and teacher

On 30 May 2017, Maestro Electo Silva passed away. He was an educator, composer, arranger, choir director, and founder of the Santiago Orfeon Choir and University Choir.

Silva Gainza was born in Santiago de Cuba on 1 November 1923. He graduated in psychology and education from the Universidad de Oriente. In 1955, he created his first choir, the polyphonic singers, and, from then on, dedicated himself to promoting choral singing, having a considerable influence on choral singing in Cuba. He founded the *Festival Nacional de Coros* (National Choir Festival) in 1961, in which choirs from many different countries participated, and which later became the *Festival Internacional de Coros de Santiago de Cuba* (Santiago de Cuba International Choir Festival). He formed several children's choirs and also the prominent women's choir 'Coro Femenino Sirenas' del Conservatorio Esteban Salas.

He directed many significant symphonic-choral works, notably *Fantasia Coral* by L.V. Beethoven, *Cantata Alejandro Nevski* by Prokofiev, and *Cantata to Santiago de Cuba* by Calixto Alvarez.

On an international scale, he worked with the 'Choir of Gothenburg' (Sweden), 'Tritonus Choir' (Denmark), The 'Dresden Radio Children's Choir' (Germany) and the 'University of Veracruz' choir.

As a composer, he wrote for all types of choirs: children, young male and female, as well as mixed-voice choirs. His works have been edited in Cuba, Denmark, Sweden, the United States and France, and were entered into contests in Latin

America and Europe.

Maestro Silva's choral works, both his originals and his arrangements, are highly recognisable thanks to the timbre and pitch used by the Cuban singer.

His use of rhythmic frames, as used in popular traditional Cuban music, and the use of polyrhythm within these frames, as well as his contribution to choral literature in general, certainly explain why he is considered as the figurehead of Cuban choral music.

He was awarded several honorary medals, including one for National Culture (2001) and the Felix Varela de Primer Grado order, awarded by the State of Cuba.

His most notable publications include:

- 30 canciones populares cubanas (30 Popular Cuban Songs)
- Canciones del Caribe (Caribbean Songs)
- Homenaje a la Trova (Homage to Trova)
- Haiti Canta. (Haiti Song)

He also published textbooks about choral music.

Santiago de Cuba is in mourning, as well as the entire Cuban choral movement. I am sure that many choirs from around the world who have sung his music will be as sad to lose him as we are.



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