



# CERVANTES'

## *smiles*

Cervantes has just had dinner at home with his family. While his wife helps clear the table, he snuggles into a rocking chair on the balcony, where every night a nice breeze ambles by.

He lights a Partagás cigarette and distractedly browses through an edition of *La Habana Elegante*. After a while the maid brings him a cup of coffee. Before the cannon sounds that announced the closing of the gates in the wall of Havana years ago, the children will gather in the living room to make music.

They will sing songs whereby he will accompany them on piano. Cervantes will play a couple of catchy habaneras and guarachas that are in fashion, while little María – the only girl among so many boys – will make everyone laugh by wanting to dance to everything and wanting to play the piano while dad is playing. That night he will play two new dances for piano finished barely a day ago. He calls them *Danzas* but actually they are true wonders of synthetic and musical exquisiteness. Short pieces in two parts of scarcely thirty-two bars, purely and elegantly expressing a certain Cubanness with the technique of an erudite composer. He always uses two different themes in each part, but so ingeniously designed that one could not exist without the other; achieving an integrated unit in those wonderful musical miniatures.

They are pieces that combine emotional warmth with intellectual depth. Intellect in the service of simplicity, of directness, of the domestic. Pieces inspired by everyday phrases, anecdotes and acquaintances. He has written over thirty and will compose a dozen more.

The cubanness of those dances accentuates the 'mestizo' mix, the transcultural from Spain, where African had already blended with Spanish before coming to America. A certain air, grace and 'Sandunga' (elation); creole freshness and playfulness were won by the music under a major black influence. Cervantes managed to melt it together and balance it in an organic way in the rhythmic element, the melodic discourse – often with counterpoint – and the harmonic structure, realizing a cohesive musical texture full of poetry.

After graduating with honors from the Conservatoire de Paris Cervantes could have made a career in Europe. He gave recitals in major concert halls not only as a pianist but also as a conductor. He had successes and hobnobbed with Liszt, Rossini and other great men in the history of music but decided to return to Cuba – 'there's no place like home' – where he continued playing, teaching and composing. He wrote symphonies, chamber music, music for theatre and a lot of piano music.

Tomorrow he will rise early and walk down O'Reilly street to take his dances to the printing house. He will simply deliver them. He will not worry about revising or annotating tempi. He will not correct them. These dances -- that have caused him to enter into the history of music and for which he is considered the greatest composer of Cuban musical nationalism of the nineteenth century -- he does not find them so important. These dances, for which he is known and that today are played in all the concert halls of the world, were no more to him than 'musical smiles'.