



Photo: Francisco Olvera

DANZÓN

In the beginning was the contradanza. A salon dance pursued in town mansions. A dance with a dance partner, in figures. Lyceums, clubhouses and philharmonic societies followed, accompanying dancers with flute, violins, clarinets, timpani and güiro.

The contradanza in two parts. Eight bars to a part. Which upon repetition become thirty-two. The first eight for the 'paseo' (stroll), and then another eight for the 'cadena' (chain), a series of calm, serene movements by the group of dancers. The 'sostenido' (square figure with the ladies on the inside) and 'cedazo' (figure in which the gentlemen turn around their ladies) in the eight of the second part; repeated, rhythmic, spicy, spirited, infected by the invention of blacks and mulattos, masters of rhythm.

After dancing the minuet, the body craves the contradanza. The dancers do not want to stop. They want to extend the dance. The lords of music repeat the parts; varying, improvising. After half an hour of dance, when the ladies are fainting in the heat of the night, new groups start afresh. And the blacks and mulattos' overflowing imagination cause wind and timpani to create crossbreed melodies that turn French romanzas and Neapolitan songs into something Creole, sensual, rhythmic, Cuban.

In the beginning was the contradanza. Now it has been named *Danza*. Ballroom dancing throughout the city. Dancing with your dance partner, in figures. In private homes, theaters, gazebos, orchestras sound their flutes, their violins, their clarinets, their timbales and güiros. Those sung they call *habaneras*.

And we must extend the dance. What must be created is a 'danzón' (a protracted danza). Yummy, lilting, lasting, to be enjoyed. Syncopated, less regular, less boring, less white than the danzas: It starts, followed by the second part. We repeat the first and - instead of repeating the second - create a new part. We will entitle it *Las Alturas de Simpson* (The Simpson Heights) and premiere it this year, 1879, here at the *Liceo de Matanzas*; with ophicleide, trombone, cornet; bass, timbales and güiro; clarinet and violin.

In the beginning was the contradanza. Now it is called *Danzón*. Danced by couples across the country. Danced in Yucatán, danced in Barranquilla. Danced on a tile in San Juan: It starts, followed

by the violin part, we return to the introduction, followed by the clarinet part. We return to the introduction and close with the *montuno* that we'll borrow from the *son*. Let the violin flourish, the clarinet shine and the dancer enjoy. With bow tie and bowler hat... Ophicleide, trombone, two clarinets, two violins, timbales, güiro and bass.

The melodious, yummy Danzón, with piano, flute and violin, bass, güiro and timbales. Now the danzón is even sung to break routine. It is danced *to the beat of the 'danzonete'*. At the philharmonic the professors play it. Danzones are composed by the Masters and enjoyed at the opera. *Charanga* bands play it on the street and people love it. It is played by jazz bands, it is played with the cello, two violins and a viola. It sounds on the piano, it sounds on victrolas.

The Cuban Danzón. Elegant, refined and sensual. A couples dance, with fan and in *guayabera*. Elegant, refined and sensual. Gallantry and classiness. National dance.