A Tale of Two Conferences – Cuba Style

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Published In
World Libraries

Document Type
Post-Print

Publication Date
1-1-2003

Subjects
Cuba, Cuban Library Association

Abstract
The past few years have seen a marked increase in the level of interest about libraries in Cuba. Twelve years ago, a rare glimpse was given in an American Libraries article which piqued some people's interest, but travel restrictions at that time left many interested in visiting but having no way to do so. However, a relaxing of travel restrictions under the Clinton administration permitted "people to people" and cultural exchanges, thus allowing more people to get a look at this country through formal tours. Several successful library tours were organized and led by people such as Rhonda Neugebauer from U.C. Riverside, Susan Weber from Vancouver, B.C., and Joyce Holmes of Friendship Tours (also from Vancouver B.C.). Much of the impetus for the organization of these tours, was in fact a reaction to several writings and e-mail posts by Robert Kent, of the "Friends of Cuban Libraries" who made multiple claims of harassment and imprisonment of so-called "Independent Librarians" in Cuba. This controversy also led to a "fact-finding" tour by a joint ALA/IFLA group in May of 2001. Much has already been written about this issue, and while it is not the focus of this report, it is an important background note for those who may wonder why some of us are so interested in this small island nation to our south. Many fine articles have also been written about libraries and the library profession in Cuba. While the tours led during 2000-2002 provided incredible experiences for all who participated in them, an opportunity to engage with our library colleagues on a deeper level presented itself in 2001. When the INFO 2002 conference was announced, the organizers extended a warm invitation for North American librarians to submit papers for consideration. Following this conference, several of us were invited back to participate in the second ASCUBI (Cuban Library Association) Congress in 2003. I was fortunate enough to be able to participate in both of these conferences, and what follows is a brief report on each.

Description
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Persistent Identifier
http://archives.pdx.edu/ds/psu/8457

Citation Details
Siegel, Gretta E. "A Tale of Two Conferences – Cuba Style" (2003). Library Faculty Publications and Presentations. 59.
https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/ulib_fac/59
Trova is a style of music that was very popular in Cuba and there are many very famous Cuban songs written in this style that are known around the world, and still very much loved and remembered today. Despite having a successful career as a musician, Corona's had a hard life and fell on rough times. He was attacked with a knife by a man who was the pimp of his prostitute girlfriend. Percussion in Cuba is a revered art and taken very seriously. It is even a sacred act in many Afro-Cuban religious ceremonies, where the beating of drums communicates with the gods. The festival features performances, competitions, concerts, lectures and speeches. Back to top of page. Workshops, exhibitions and conferences run alongside the dance performances. Back to top of page.