

## Performing New Music in Cuba: Manuel Duchesne Cuzán and “Nuestro Tiempo”

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**Abstract:** *Historical accounts of Cuban music after the 1960s converge on recognizing a group of musicians as key actors in the emergence and development of an avant-garde approach to contemporary art music. While they were predominantly composers, all narratives emphasise the role of the orchestra conductor Manuel Duchesne Cuzán as a crucial figure in disseminating avant-garde discourses to national audiences. As conductor of the Cuban National Symphony Orchestra, and founder of the ensemble “Conjunto Instrumental Nuestro Tiempo”, his career included several premieres of new music during the sixties, the seventies and the eighties. This paper examines this musical trajectory through historical and historiographical approaches, as well as the analysis of documentary corpus to illustrate the contribution of performers to the process of meaning-making in repertoire and aesthetic movements.*

Key-words: *Cuba, New Music, Avant-garde, Performers, Manuel Duchesne Cuzán*

### 1. Introduction

The recognition of musical performance as a site of meaning production is no longer new in musicological discourse; nevertheless, historical and historiographical approaches have continued to privilege the compositional process. In the context of Cuban art music of the twentieth century, such narratives have been predominantly formulated through genealogies of composers, leaving the role of performers relatively underexplored. However, when examining the avant-garde movement that emerged in the 1960s, one name consistently appears as a decisive figure in its promotion and consolidation: Manuel Duchesne Cuzán. The present paper focuses on his trajectory and contributions to the development of Cuban contemporary music from the 1960s to the 1980s.

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It explores the active role of performers in the flourishing of certain contemporary repertoires, with particular emphasis on Duchesne Cuzán's work as conductor of the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional de Cuba (Cuban National Symphony Orchestra, OSN) and founder of the Conjunto Instrumental "Nuestro Tiempo" (Instrumental Ensemble "Our Time", CINT) in 1971.

The CINT, mainly integrated by members of the National Symphony, was distinguished by its flexible instrumentation, which enable a broad spectrum of formats —from chamber ensembles to orchestral settings— and an equally diverse repertoire. Its programmes juxtaposed early Cuban modernists such as Amadeo Roldán and Alejandro García Caturla, often described as the "first avant-garde", with the "sixties generation" and leading figures of the international contemporary scene.

From a historical standpoint, and through an analysis of contemporary critical reception, this study highlights how Duchesne Cuzán and the CINT not only acted as a vehicle for the dissemination of new music but also as a catalyst for the creation of works tailored to their interpretative potential. Consequently, the ensemble assumed a central role in the consolidation and transformation of Cuba's contemporary music environment.

This paper proposes to reassess the historical relevance of performers such as Duchesne Cuzán within the context of aesthetic and institutional movements, particularly as exemplified by the Cuban avant-garde, rather than offering a formal or analytical reading of individual performances. As premise, the study states that performers do not simply transmit pre-existing compositional intent but actively co-create musical meaning. This position is supported by the assertion of Nicholas Cook that "performers make an indispensable contribution to the culture of creative practice that is music" (Cook 2013, 1). Furthermore, he reminds us that "performances create meaning in relation to other performances, and not just in relation to works" (2013, 224). Following this, a more comprehensive understanding of the role of performers within broader cultural processes can be achieved by demonstrating their ability to configure meaning dialogically across traditions, aesthetics, and generations.

This approach aligns with the so-called performative turn in musicology, an intellectual movement that repositions performance as a primary site of musical thought (Cook 2001, 2013). Subsequently, the performer emerges as an active participant in the process of understanding, circulation, and legitimisation of music within specific cultural contexts.

This vision can be complemented by the approach of Philip Auslander regarding the social and performative dimensions of identity within musical practice. Regardless the author's notably broader perspective on performance studies, it is asserted that his proposition concerning the notion of every musical

act being also a performance of self—an articulation of persona shaped by cultural codes of authority, authenticity, and style—deserves consideration here. According to him, the “performer’s persona” is not only expressive but strategic, and mediate between the individual artist, the work performed, and the expectations of audiences and institutions (Auslander 2004).

These perspectives converge in redefining the performer as a mediator between aesthetic intention and social reception—a figure capable of influencing not only the interpretation of works but also the discursive frameworks that sustain them. This conceptual framework provides the theoretical foundation to analyse Manuel Duchesne Cuzán as a performer and cultural agent whose influence extended beyond the musical sphere, as well as to illustrate how his decisions heading the OSN and the CINT functioned as performative acts of meaning-making and reframed the understanding of contemporary repertoire in Cuba.

## **2. Manuel Duchesne Cuzán: Music Excellence and Ideo-Aesthetic Commitment**

Contemporaries frequently described Manuel Duchesne Cuzán (Havana, 1932- 2005) as one of the cornerstones of twentieth-century Cuban musical life, and an indispensable figure for understanding the country’s aesthetic transformations (Amer 2005). His influence extended beyond the artistic sphere: it encompassed institutional development, audience education and the modernisation of public taste.

Duchesne received his musical education at the Municipal Conservatory of Music of Havana from 1944 to 1954. There, he studied with some distinguished figures in Cuban music pedagogy: Aida Teseiro, Georgina Ramos, Raúl Gómez Ankermann, Ángela Quintana, Pedro Mercado, Edgardo Martín, Harold Gramatges, and José Ardévol. He began his orchestral conducting training under the supervision of Enrique González Mántici—later the National Symphony Orchestra’s first principal conductor. He then refined his technique with Igor Markevitch. (Alén 1999) This training exposed him to the prevailing European interpretative models of the mid twentieth century, which would later influence his aesthetic balance between discipline and expressive freedom.

His professional career began in 1954, when he became conductor of the Alicia Alonso Ballet Orchestra—the precursor to the National Ballet of Cuba—and toured Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay. Between 1955 and 1958, he appeared as guest conductor with the Havana Philharmonic Orchestra, the CMQ Radio Symphony Orchestra, and the Chamber Orchestra of the Concert Society. These engagements consolidated his reputation within Cuba’s most important musical institutions, establishing him as a figure of growing authority.

During this same period, Duchesne's ideological position also took shape. He joined the Sociedad Cultural Nuestro Tiempo ("Our Time" Cultural Society, SCNT), a crucial forum for artists and intellectuals committed to progressive cultural renewal, where he also served as conductor of its chamber ensemble (Alén 1999). This early involvement in the SCNT augurs his later work with the OSN, where he implemented the same principles of aesthetic renewal and public engagement that the society had advocated before 1959 (Quevedo 2019, 20-21).



Fig. 1. *Manuel Duchesne Cuzán*. Film still taken from the documentary "Tiempo de Duchesne" (dir. Tony Lechuga, 2010).

After the triumph of the 1959 Revolution, he joined the newly established institutional system and initially assumed the direction of the National Theatre Orchestra and the National Modern Dance Ensemble, which expanded his artistic scope. The following year, he participated in the founding of the National Symphony Orchestra, initially serving as assistant conductor and, from 1963, sharing the role of principal conductor. At the same time, he developed his teaching career at the Alejandro García Caturla Conservatory, where he offered classes in orchestral conducting. This experience was resumed with the foundation of the Instituto Superior de Arte (High Institute of the Arts, ISA), in 1976, when he joined its faculty as professor of orchestral conducting during its early years and contributed to the training of a new generation of Cuban conductors.

From the sixties decade onwards, Duchesne expanded his activity to the film sphere as musical director of the Instituto Cubano de Industria y Arte

Cinematográficos (Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry, ICAIC). He supervised and conducted the recording of scores for more than four hundred films, thereby establishing one of the most sustained collaborations between symphonic music and film production in Cuban cultural history (Amer 2005).

Between 1968 and 1970, he was appointed general director of the National Theatre of Ballet and Opera of Cuba. He then began his work as an opera director, during which time he promoted national productions and expanded his expertise in stage repertoire.

In 1971, Duchesne founded the Conjunto Instrumental Nuestro Tiempo (CINT), an ensemble dedicated to performing the Cuban and international twentieth-century music. Conceived as a *laboratory for new sound aesthetics*, the ensemble became a significant platform for the dissemination of contemporary music in Cuba. Its flexible instrumentation enabled the listening of a wide variety of repertoire, from chamber works to large-scale ensemble pieces, and the concerts frequently featured world and national premieres.

It is estimated that Duchesne's total repertoire comprised more than seven hundred works, of which almost three hundred were either world premieres or national first performances (Alén 1999). This remarkable record confirms his constant dedication to the dissemination of contemporary creation and his ability to integrate diverse musical languages within the concert tradition.

This brief overview of Manuel Duchesne Cuzán's musical career enables us to understand performance practice —particularly orchestral conducting—, as both a technical and interpretative discipline, as well as an act of aesthetic and cultural negotiation. His actions were instrumental in establishing a new musical canon, in terms of contemporary aesthetic positions, from performing practices, to musical education and institutional policies.

## 2.1. Duchesne and the Cuban Musical Avant-Garde

In any study of the Cuban musical avant-garde of the 1960s, it is necessary to recognise Manuel Duchesne Cuzán as a key figure in the process of aesthetic renewal that transformed the concert music scene in Cuba following the Revolution. His work at the helm of the Cuban National Symphony Orchestra was decisive in introducing, disseminating, and legitimising new compositional trends, inspired by European and Latin American experimental tendencies. These trends aimed to reconfigure the national musical discourse in dialogue with the socio-political transformations of the time.

From 1968 onwards, Duchesne also took on the role of general director of the orchestra, a position held until 1980, when it was taken over by Leo Brouwer.

Throughout this period, the musicians recognised Duchesne as the leader who brought coherence to the orchestra's performances, based on his personal commitment to the objectivity that guided his professional experience (Socorro 2012, 41).

One of the earliest testimonies clearly placing Duchesne at the heart of the movement is Leo Brouwer's text, "La vanguardia en la música cubana" (The avant-garde in Cuban music, 1970). In this essay, the composer reconstructs the events that marked the beginning of the movement and explicitly recognises the conductor's role in its institutional realisation. According to Brouwer:

In 1964, after retreating into an effective maturation of ideas, my *Sonograma I* (1963) for prepared piano was performed at the Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC)[...] A little later, in July of that year, Manuel Duchesne Cuzán, conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra, gave the first in a series of "new music" concerts, featuring Polish and Cuban works: Tadeusz Baird, Grazyna Bacewicz, [Juan] Blanco (*Texturas*, for tape and orchestra) and Penderecki. (Brouwer 1970)<sup>3</sup>

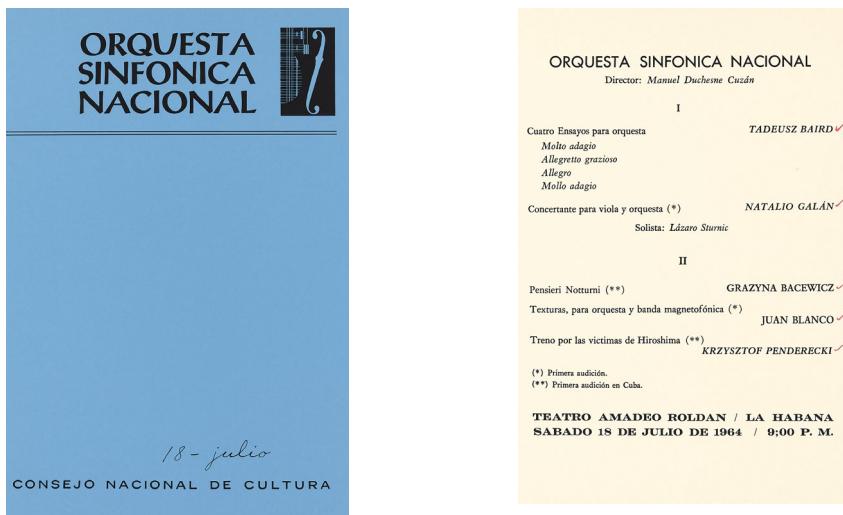


Fig. 2. Pictures taken from the above-mentioned OSN's concert programme (1964/7/18). Cuban National Symphony Orchestra's Archive

<sup>3</sup> "En el año 1964, después de replegarnos en una maduración efectiva de ideas, se efectuó la audición de mi *Sonograma I* (1963) para piano preparado, en la Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba (UNEAC) [...] Un poco después, en julio de ese año, Manuel Duchesne Cuzán, director de la Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional, hizo el primero de una serie de conciertos de "música nueva", con obras polacas y cubanas: Tadeusz Baird, Grazyna Bacewicz, Blanco (*Texturas*, para banda magnetofónica y orquesta) y Penderecki."

That concert, with its strong symbolic impact, marked the beginning of a process of programmatic openness that linked the OSN with the international contemporary repertoire. Duchesne thus became the vehicle for disseminating new musical languages, articulating a programming policy that systematically incorporated recent works by Cuban and foreign composers. Brouwer adds that “[...] the work of disseminating new music in that organization amounts to approximately one new work per concert (which allowed the orchestra not to feel strange in the face of composers such as L. Ferrari, N. Castiglioni, W. Kilar, de Pablo or B. Schaffer)” (Brouwer 1970).<sup>4</sup>

This testimony confirms that Duchesne’s work transcended mere performance to enter the realm of aesthetic mediation. The critic Ángel Vázquez Millares, quoted by Brouwer in the same text, summed up this function accurately:

Possibly nothing has contributed as much to the evolution of our audience’s musical taste as the work done by conductor Manuel Duchesne Cuzán from the podium of the National Symphony Orchestra. He has brought almost all of Cuba’s avant-garde creations to his music stands, confronting the listener with new sound experiences. (Brouwer 1970)<sup>5</sup>

Based on these contemporary accounts, subsequent historiography has established Duchesne as one of the articulating axes of the movement. Consequently, Eli Rodríguez identifies the “initial nucleus of the avant-garde” as consisting of Leo Brouwer and Juan Blanco as composers and Duchesne Cuzán at the helm of the National Symphony Orchestra. Later, it is also noted that, under his direction, the OSN’s programmes prioritised the premieres and regular performances of Cuban and international avant-garde works, representative of contemporary trends, and contributing to a climate conducive to creation (Eli Rodríguez and Gómez García 1995, 404).

These assessments locate Duchesne at the intersection of performance, cultural management, and aesthetic education. From his institutional position, he played an educational role for both the public and the musicians, promoting an awareness of contemporaneity that linked artistic practice with the cultural renewal dynamics driven by the new revolutionary order.

<sup>4</sup> “[...] la labor de divulgación de la música nueva en ese organismo llega a una proporción de una obra nueva por concierto aproximadamente (esto hace que la Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional no se sienta extraña frente a autores como L. Ferrari, N. Castiglioni, W. Kilar, de Pablo o B. Schaffer...).”

<sup>5</sup> “Posiblemente nada ha contribuido tanto a la evolución del gusto musical de nuestro público, como la labor realizada por el director Manuel Duchesne Cuzán, desde el pódium de la Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional. Ha llevado a sus atriles casi toda la creación cubana de vanguardia, enfrentando al oyente con nuevas experiencias sonoras.”

In this sense, he embodies what Nicholas Cook (2013) terms the performer as meaning-maker: a performer whose practice generates cultural meaning through mediation between work, context and audience. In his own reflections, Duchesne demonstrated a clear awareness of the historical and political nature of the process he was leading. In a talk offered at Casa de las Américas in 1977<sup>6</sup> he stated:

[...] from 1963-64 onwards, we began working with so-called avant-garde music, programming, and information about avant-garde music through all the means at our disposal: the Symphony Orchestra, chamber ensembles, the mass media, television, radio, as well as discussion.

It was time when this type of discussion about aesthetic issues arose for the first time, freed from previous premises, as we, as part of the people, were now the owners of all the country's resources (Duchesne Cuzán 1977, 21).<sup>7</sup>

This statement reveals an understanding of the avant-garde project as a comprehensive renewal of the Cuban musical field, linked to the structural transformations of the political and social context after 1959. Duchesne conceives of "new music" as an emancipatory practice, that is both aesthetic and institutional, which implied a redefinition of the roles of performers, composers, and audiences.

In the same publication, he warns that the movement was not limited to a generational confrontation:

At first, it was said that this discussion was a generational problem, but the passing years have shown that not only young people, but also those who are less young or who could be described as old, have incorporated the use of current techniques. In reality, this has been a movement in which, at this moment, we are all involved, and we have the same criteria and the same principles. (Duchesne Cuzán 1977, 22)<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Published by the magazine *Música* (no. 67: 18-23), this was part of the roundtable "Sobre la música de nuestra América [About the music of our America]", where also participated musicians from Cuba, Brazil, and Mexico.

<sup>7</sup> "[...] a partir del año 63-64 comenzamos un trabajo con la llamada música de vanguardia, la programación, la información de la música de vanguardia a través de todos los medios con que contábamos, la Orquesta Sinfónica, los conjuntos de cámara, los medios de difusión masiva, la televisión, la radio, así como la discusión. Fue un momento donde por primera vez se produce este tipo de discusión en cuanto al problema estético, liberados de las premisas anteriores, al ser dueños nosotros, como parte del pueblo, de todos los recursos del país."

<sup>8</sup> "Al principio se dijo que esta discusión era un problema generacional, sin embargo, los años transcurridos han demostrado que se han incorporado a la utilización de las técnicas actuales no

Through this, the director emphasizes the collective and transversal nature of musical renewal, in which the avant-garde is understood as a natural extension of the historical development of art, rather than a radical break with tradition. This perspective coincides with the later interpretation offered by Eli Rodríguez and Gómez García (1995, 402), who defined the Cuban avant-garde as a “new update”, comparable to that carried out in the 1920s and 1930s by Alejandro García Caturla and Amadeo Roldán but now updated considering the cultural conditions of the revolutionary period.

In an interview given in 1988 to the magazine *Clave*, Duchesne offered a retrospective view of his participation in this process:

Starting in 1964, the first work with a totally new language that I conducted in concert was Schönberg's Five Pieces for Orchestra. This was followed by Penderecki's *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima*, and Juan [Blanco], Leo [Brouwer] and later Carlos Fariñas began to write works for orchestra. Roberto Valera joined in, and this movement began, which would not have been possible if we had not had an important organization at our disposal, which was not only the Symphony Orchestra, but also the Chamber Orchestra, different instrumental formats and some soloists willing to collaborate [...] (Duchesne Cuzán 1988, 50).<sup>9</sup>

This statement testifies not only to his leading role in creating the material conditions for the development of the avant-garde, but also to his role as a cultural manager. His ability to bring together an orchestra, chamber musicians and soloists provided composers with the means necessary to experiment with new sounds.

Duchesne conceived of the movement as a response to the “stagnation” of previous musical language, in line with his own notion of the avant-garde as a “rupture due to saturation”:

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solamente los jóvenes, sino los menos jóvenes o los que pudieran calificar de viejos, sino que en realidad, esto ha sido un movimiento al cual, en este momento, estamos incorporados todos, y tenemos los mismos criterios y los mismos principios.”

<sup>9</sup> “A partir de 1964, la primera obra con un lenguaje totalmente nuevo que dirigi en concierto fue *Cinco piezas para orquesta* de Schönberg. Le siguió el *Treno a las víctimas de Hiroshima* de Penderecki, además de que Juan [Blanco], Leo [Brouwer] y después Carlos Fariñas comenzaron a escribir obras para orquesta. Se sumó Roberto Valera y se inició este movimiento, el cual no hubiera sido posible si no hubiéramos tenido un organismo importante en las manos que no era solamente la Orquesta Sinfónica, también se contaba con la Orquesta de Cámara, distintos formatos instrumentales y algunos solistas dispuestos a colaborar [...]”

This musical avant-garde movement in Cuba was nothing more than a break with the existing saturation of sound [...] it is necessary to situate oneself well in the temporal context in which one lives [...] the fundamental importance [of the avant-garde] is the rupture through saturation or stagnation with what precedes it (Duchesne Cuzán 1988, 51).<sup>10</sup>

These words reflect his view about aesthetic change as a historical necessity, and not a passing fad. According to them, the avant-garde, is not an isolated phenomenon or a simple imitation of European models, but rather a natural consequence of musical evolution, driven by the country's cultural and social conditions.

After these observations, it is possible to assert that Manuel Duchesne Cuzán's role in the emergence and development of the Cuban musical avant-garde transcended the performer's one and established him as a mediator and catalyst of aesthetic and symbolic modernisation processes. His legacy confirms that the history of twentieth-century Cuban music cannot be understood without addressing the performative and cultural dimension of the interpretative work.

### **3. “Nuestro Tiempo”: Diversity and Flexibility in Performing New Music Repertoires**

The creation of the Conjunto Instrumental Nuestro Tiempo (CINT) in 1971, led by Manuel Duchesne Cuzán, was a notable endeavour for the dissemination of contemporary music in Cuba. Conceived as a flexible group open to various instrumental formats, the ensemble became a platform for dialogue between the poetics of the Cuban avant-garde and international trends during the second half of the twentieth century.

Its repertoire is partially documented in the book *Música académica contemporánea cubana. Catálogo de difusión (1961–1990)* (Pérez Gómez 2011), based on the archives of the National Symphony Orchestra. Other sources include programmes from events such as the Festival of Contemporary Music of the Socialist Countries, the Havana Contemporary Music Festival and the Casa de las Américas Latin American Music Encounter. These documentary sources are held in the National Library of Cuba, the Centre for Research and Development of Cuban

<sup>10</sup> “Este movimiento de la vanguardia musical en Cuba no fue más que un rompimiento con la saturación sonora existente. [...] hay que situarse bien en el contexto temporal donde se vive... la importancia fundamental [de la vanguardia] es el rompimiento por saturación o anquilosamiento con lo que le precede”.

Music, and the National Museum of Music. An overview of this sample, covering the period between 1972 and 1989, reveals the breadth and coherence of Duchesne Cuzán’s project.

<b>Violin</b>	Federico Britos José A. Sánchez Maruja Sánchez Oscar Carreras Elena Angelova Alejandro Ferreira Zdravko Asparujov Gregorio Corzo José Manuel Fernández	<b>Oboe</b>	Arnaldo Arencibia Jorge Rivero
		<b>Flute</b>	Manuel Coya Rositza Ivanova Alberto Corrales Manuel Valdés
		<b>Bassoon</b>	Lazar Stoychev
		<b>Horn</b>	Francisco Santiago
		<b>Trumpet</b>	Alejandro Pichardo
<b>Viola</b>	Osvaldo Cañizares Marivonne Drobache Miguel Pinto	<b>Percussion</b>	Luis Aragú Luis A. Barrera Federico Chea
<b>Violoncello</b>	Miguel A. Reina Vladimir Drobache Gladys Lo		Agustín Jiménez Marcos Valcárcel Pura Ortiz
<b>Double bass</b>	Orlando López Karel Kopriva	<b>Piano</b>	

Table 1. *CINT members mentioned by concert programmes (seventies and eighties decades).*

The ensemble comprised musicians from the National Symphony Orchestra, selected according to the requirements of each programme, as well as guest musicians, who participated either as ensemble members or as soloists.

CINT was characterised by marked organisational and sonic flexibility, which allowed it to perform a variety of repertoire, ranging from traditional chamber music to experimental electroacoustic and multimedia works. This versatility is evident in the diversity of instrumental formats present in the ensemble’s concerts: string quartets (*Cuarteto para arcos* by H. Angulo, *Tatomaité* by C. Fariñas), vocal and instrumental combinations (*Rimas* by C. Álvarez, *Es el amor quien ve* by L. Brouwer, *Infierno* by H. Gramatges), expanded ensembles (*Contrapunto Espacial no. 5* by J. Blanco, *Guirigay* by H. Gramatges) and experimental percussion groups (*Música Viva no. 1* by J. Loyola). This spectrum of configurations confirms the ensemble’s intention to approach performance as an open process, in which the instrumental format adapted to the expressive demands of each piece rather than following a stable or conventional template.

The following table illustrates this criterion, based on the above-mentioned sources:

Composer	Work (year, instrumentation)	Date/Premiere(*)
C. Álvarez (1938)	<i>Póker</i> (1971, string quartet)	1972/10/02
	<i>Rimas</i> (1972, soprano, violin, viola, cello, guitar)	1981/01/27
	<i>Pasos</i> (1983, chamber ensemble)	1984/01/9
		1985/03/31
H. Angulo (1932–2018)	<i>Sonata para once instrumentos</i> (1967, 2 flutes, oboe, trumpet, piano, timpani, 2 violins, viola, violoncello, doble bass)	1972/09/27
	<i>Cuarteto para arcos</i> (1964, string quartet)	1973/01
	<i>Poema</i> (1970, flute, bassoon, violin, violoncello, piano)	1978/04/19 (*)
	<i>La estrella y la paloma</i> (1978, reciter, flute, guitar, violoncello, percussion)	1981/01/27
J. Ardévol (1911–1981)	<i>Ditirambo</i> (1969, flute, guitar, vibraphone, percussion)	1978/04/19
J. Berroa (1938–2006)	<i>Concierto para piano y trece instrumentos</i> (1982)	1982/10/07 (*)
J. Blanco (1919–2008)	<i>Contrapunto espacial no. 5</i> (1971–1982, mixed ensemble with actors)	1982/10/07 (*)
	<i>Epístola</i> (1972, reciter, chamber ensemble)	1981/01/27
	<i>4+1</i> (1978, 4 flutes, percussion)	1978/04/19 (*)
L. Brouwer (1939)	<i>Cantos yoruba</i> (1970, voice, chamber ensemble)	1985/10/03 (*)
	<i>Es el amor quien ve</i> (1972, soprano, flute, violin, cello, guitar, vibraphone, piano)	1981/01/27
	<i>Canción de gesta (Epopeya del Granma)</i> (1969, chamber ensemble version)	1984/10/03
C. Fariñas (1934–2002)	<i>Tatomaité</i> (1972, string quartet)	1972/10/02
S. F. Barroso (1946)	<i>Concierto</i> (1972, one or more bowed instruments and four sound sources)	1972/09/29
J. Garciaporrúa (1938–2023)	<i>Y viceversa</i> (1977, string quintet)	1979/02
E. González Mántici (1916–1974)	<i>Cuarteto de cuerdas</i> (1951, string quartet)	1978/04/19
H. Gramatges (1918–2008)	<i>Móvil II</i> (1970, flute, horn, piano, percussion)	1972/09/27
	<i>Síntesis</i> (1970, flute, viola, guitar, percussion)	1978/04/19
	<i>Infierno</i> (1973, baritone, guitar, flute, cello, vibraphone)	1981/01/27
	<i>Guirigay</i> (1985, double quintet)	1985/10/03 (*)

Composer	Work (year, instrumentation)	Date/Premiere(*)
F. Guerrero (1917-2001)	<i>Son no. 6</i> (1952, version 1981 for chamber ensemble)	1984/01/09
A. León (1918-1991)	<i>Para cantar junto a un rumbero de Simpson</i> (1974, cajón quinto, chamber orchestra)	1985/03/31
	<i>Música para Nuestro Tiempo</i> (1979, chamber ensemble)	1984/01/09
J. López Marín (1949)	<i>Concierto cubano para violoncello y conjunto sinfónico</i> (1983, violoncello, symphony orchestra)	1984/01/09
	<i>Música Viva no. 1</i> (1971, six percussionists)	1978/05/10
J. Loyola (1941)	<i>Música Viva no. 4</i> (1979, chamber ensemble)	1979/11/29
	<i>Canto negro</i> (1979, baritone, piano, percussion)	1989/10/09
N. Rodríguez (1921-1997)	<i>Triplum</i> (1964, oboe, clarinet, bassoon)	1972/09/29
J. Roloff (1951)	<i>Metalea I</i> (1984, chamber ensemble)	1985/10/03 (*)
	<i>Cláustros de mármol</i> (1970, vocal soloist, chamber ensemble)	1981/01/27
R. Valera (1938)	<i>Tres impertinencias</i> (1971, chamber ensemble)	1978/02/15

Table 2. Cuban repertoire performed by the Conjunto Instrumental Nuestro Tiempo (selection).

In terms of aesthetic diversity, CINT's programming demonstrates a plural and transnational approach to the dissemination of contemporary repertoires. Under Duchesne Cuzán's direction, the ensemble presented world premieres or first performances of works by national composers —Brouwer, Blanco, Fariñas, Gramatges, Loyola, López Marín, Valera, among others—, alongside international authors from Eastern Europe and Latin America, such as Krzysztof Penderecki, Grażyna Bacewicz, Alfred Schnittke, Edison Denisov, Vladimir Artyomov, Gerardo Gandini and Roque Cordero.

The presence of works from countries such as Poland, the former USSR, Czechoslovakia, and GDR, as well as Bulgaria, Argentina and Panama, demonstrates the ensemble's international reach and its integration into a cultural circuit linked to the international festivals promoted in Cuba. In this sense, Duchesne Cuzán acted as a mediator between different poles of aesthetic legitimacy, favouring the integration of the Cuban avant-garde into the international environment.

Year	Composer	Work (year, instrumentation)/Premier in Cuba (*)
1972	M. Etkin (Argentina)	<i>Soles</i> (1967, flute, horn, double bass)
1972	C. Aharonián (Uruguay)	<i>Música para tres</i> (1968, violin, flute, piano)
1972	H. Tosar (Uruguay)	<i>Espejos I y II</i> (wind quintet)
1972	A. Núñez-Allauca (Peru)	<i>Cuarteto I</i> (1969, string quartet)
1972	C. Garrido-Lecca (Peru)	<i>Intihuatana</i> (1967, string quartet)
1979	G. Bacewicz (Poland)	<i>Divertimento</i> (1965, string orchestra) (*)
1979	H. Eisler (GDR)	<i>Kammersinfonie</i> [Chamber Symphony] (1940, 15 instruments) (*)
1979	L. Kubík (Czechoslovakia)	<i>Nárek bojovníkovy ženy</i> [The Lament of a Warrior's Wife] (1974, soprano, chamber ensemble) (*)
1979	V. Kučera (Czechoslovakia)	<i>Argot</i> (1970, brass quintet) (*)
1979	S. Slonimsky (USSR)	<i>Antifoni</i> [Antiphons] (1968, string quartet) (*)
1981	J. Klusák (Czechoslovakia)	<i>Invence III</i> [Invention III] (1962, strings) (*)
1981	Z. Pololánik (Czechoslovakia)	<i>Musica concise</i> (1963, flute, bassoon, clarinet, piano, harpsichord, percussion) (*)
1981	K. Reiner (Czechoslovakia)	<i>Trio for flute, bass clarinet and percussion</i> (1964)
1981	J. Tausinger (Czechoslovakia)	<i>Wind quintet</i> (1967-68, 2 trumpets, horn, 2 trombones) (*)
1983	D. Täpkov (Bulgaria)	<i>String Quartet no. 2</i> (1972) (*)
1983	V. Kazandzhiev (Bulgaria)	<i>Wind Quintet</i> (1951) (*)
1983	E. Denisov (USSR)	<i>Canon in Memory of Stravinsky</i> (1972, flute, clarinet, harp)
1983	V. Artyomov (USSR)	<i>Sonata Ricercata</i> (1978, percussion) (*)
1983	A. Schnittke (USSR)	<i>Hymns I-IV</i> (1974-79, solo cello, bassoon, double bass, percussion, harp, harpsichord) (*)
1983	D. Smirnov (USSR)	<i>In memoriam Igor Stravinski</i> (*)
1984	A. R. Rattenbach (Argentina)	<i>Serenata</i> (1966, flute, clarinet, trumpet, cello) (*)
1984	R. Cordero (Panamá)	<i>Permutaciones 7</i> (1967, chamber ensemble) (*)
1984	G. Gandini (Argentina)	<i>Eusebius, cuatro nocturnos para piano</i> (1984) (*)
1984	E. Denisov (USSR)	<i>Sun of the Incas</i> (1964, soprano and chamber ensemble) (*)
1984	A. Melikov (USSR)	<i>Symphony no. 3</i> (1973) (*)
1985	A. Dutkiewicz (Poland)	<i>Concerto</i> (piano and chamber orchestra) (*)
1985	V. Komarov (USSR)	<i>Concerto for 7 instruments</i> (*)
1985	J. P. Thilman (GDR)	<i>Orpheus, Concerto for English horn and small orchestra</i> (1969) (*)

Table 3. International repertoire performed by the Conjunto Instrumental Nuestro Tiempo (selection).

The repertoire performed by CINT during the 1970s and 1980s brought diverse traditions and aesthetics into dialogue and generated a field of performative experimentation consistent with the theoretical conceptions of Nicholas Cook and Philip Auslander. Considering Cook’s proposal, the practice of Duchesne Cuzán and his ensemble can be understood as a process of meaning-making, whereby performance becomes a creative and relational act. The selection and articulation of works in specific institutional contexts —festivals, conferences and tributes— produced meanings that transcended the musical realm, inscribing the avant-garde as part of the revolutionary cultural discourse. From Auslander’s perspective, CINT projected a *collective performative persona* —a group identity associated with experimentation, openness and contemporaneity— which gave symbolic value to their interpretive practice within the Cuban cultural environment.



Fig. 3. *Conjunto Instrumental Nuestro Tiempo* (CINT). Film still taken from the documentary “*Tiempo de Duchesne*” (dir. Tony Lechuga, 2010).

The Conjunto Instrumental Nuestro Tiempo, under the direction of Manuel Duchesne Cuzán, established itself as a space of convergence between creation, performance and cultural mediation. Its structural flexibility and aesthetic diversity facilitated public and musician access to the new poetics of sonic modernity. This contributed to the legitimisation of avant-garde music as an institutional

expression of Cuban art during this period. Through this work, Duchesne Cuzán reaffirmed the role of the performer as a decisive agent in the circulation and consolidation of contemporary repertoires, transforming the exercise of musical direction into a practice of cultural construction.

Beyond its concert function as a vehicle for the dissemination of contemporary repertoires, the ensemble promoted the circulation of new instrumental techniques and direct knowledge of avant-garde languages, as well as developed performative skills associated to twentieth-century music.

In performative terms, the ensemble functioned as a community of practice that translated avant-garde ideas into collective sound experiences. Duchesne Cuzán developed conducting style combining technical rigour with experimental openness, to generate collaboration between composers and performers as an extension of the innovative impulse of the 1960s.

Consequently, the ensemble became a space for symbolic transfer between generations, where interpretive practice simultaneously constituted a means of learning, legitimisation, and projection of “new music” in the national and international context. Its organisational flexibility, the diversity of repertoires and its articulation with institutional and pedagogical spaces reveal a comprehensive conception of musical practice as a creative and social process.

In this sense, Duchesne Cuzán promoted not only the dissemination of contemporary music, but also the material, symbolic and educational conditions necessary for its long-term sustainability over time. The ensemble’s work reaffirms the role of the performer as an active cultural agent. It consolidates avant-garde repertoire, defines Cuban musical modernity, and creates a foundation to understand the history of national music, also through performance practices.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The case study of Manuel Duchesne Cuzán demonstrates that the role of the performer is decisive in shaping, legitimising, and disseminating contemporary repertoires. His career leading key institutions and groups such as the National Symphony Orchestra of Cuba, or the ensemble Nuestro Tiempo, shows that musical direction is a space for cultural mediation, where the artistic, pedagogical, and institutional aspects of musical practice converge. Through his work, Duchesne Cuzán developed an integrative vision of musical performance, which involved renewing the repertoire as well as forming an audience receptive to the new aesthetics of the twentieth century.

According to Nicholas Cook’s theoretical framework, this contribution can be understood as a form of meaning-making, where performance is not merely an act of reproduction, but becomes a generative process of meaning. Duchesne Cuzán influenced the production of meaning simultaneously through his performances, and his programme and pedagogical choices, which directly impacted the definition of a new Cuban musical canon. By systematically incorporating national and international avant-garde works into his repertoire, he helped to establish experimental aesthetics as a legitimate expression of musical contemporaneity in the cultural life of the country.

He embodies what Philip Auslander defines as the performative persona of the performer: a symbolic construction articulating the relationship between work, institution, and audience. From the podium, Duchesne Cuzán projected an artistic identity representing simultaneously the institutional authority of the conductor and the innovative commitment of the contemporary creator. His stage presence, teaching and work in cinema demonstrate an expanded performative practice, in which the conductor acts as a mediator between the aesthetic discourse of the avant-garde and the cultural imagination of his time.

Manuel Duchesne Cuzán’s influence on twentieth-century Cuban musical life demonstrates that performers are active agents in constructing artistic modernity and consolidating the value systems that define the contemporary repertoire. His work in musical performance, management and education contributed not only to the dissemination of new aesthetics, but also to the consolidation of a new canon that integrated sound experimentation into the nation’s cultural landscape. Recognising his role therefore enables us to reconsider the history of Cuban music from a performative perspective, in which the creation of meaning is the result of the interaction between composers, performers, institutions, and audiences within a context of social and aesthetic transformation.

Thus, the theoretical framework advanced by Cook and Auslander enables this paper to progress from descriptive historiography to a performative understanding of cultural change. It recognises performance as a *mode of musical thought* and a *social practice of mediation* in which interpretation, identity and institutional context converge. Within this paradigm, the performer —here exemplified by Duchesne Cuzán— emerges as a critical agent in the processes through which repertoires are interpreted, legitimised, canonised and given meaning within the evolving narratives of twentieth-century musical modernity.

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