María Caridad Cumaná, Karen Dubinsky & Xenia Reloba de la Cruz (eds.)  

*My Havana* tells the story of one of the central figures of the Cuban *nueva trova*. Carlos Varela, the “Cuban Bob Dylan” (p. xv), is known for critically addressing the politics of the Special Period, yet remaining relevant to a new generation of listeners. This book establishes his significance as a key historical figure, placing him next to Silvio Rodríguez in the annals of *nueva trova* fame, and situating him as an important spokesperson for Cubans at home and abroad. It includes essays by authors from a broad range of disciplinary backgrounds, including film critics, British diplomats, musicologists, and social historians, many of whom cite their personal experiences with Varela. It also contains an interview with him and a compendium of his lyrics with their first-ever translations into English.

The chapters are as varied as the authors who wrote them. Following an introduction that underscores the multidimensionality of Cuban identity, the first two directly address Varela's significance for Cuban listeners. Chapter 1 opens with a wide-angle reception history of his music in Cuba, including popular discourse about his politics and his recorded albums. In Chapter 2, the impact of Varela’s music is metaphorized as a simultaneous circle and a line: though his music remains rooted in the events of the Special Period, it also emphasizes generational renewal, reviving itself for new listeners.

The following chapters deal with Varela’s aesthetic. Chapter 3 analyzes the songs on a single album, *Como los peces*, and the ways in which they relate to the political and social realities of the Special Period. Chapters 4 and 5 examine nonmusical perspectives on Varela’s songs: a social historian positions Varela as a cultural historian in his own right through the analysis of specific references made in his song lyrics, and a film critic draws on Varela's history in theater and his statements about the photographic nature of his writing to suggest a “cinematic” quality in his music and lyrics.

The final two chapters situate Varela geographically and historically. Chapter 6 addresses his relationship to Havana’s cityscape, particularly focusing on the figure of the ambulant *trovador* and the sense of nostalgia heavily associated with Havana. Varela’s connection to the city underscores his significance to the Cuban people, an undercurrent that runs through all of the essays. Chapter 7 shows that Varela’s music expands not just across space, but also across time, as demonstrated through the longer trajectory of Cuban political song. The prologue and epilogue describe the personal experiences of singer Jackson.
Browne and former British ambassador to Cuba Paul Webster Hare with Varela, emphasizing the reach of his work across disciplines.

What emerges from this panoply of perspectives is an understanding of the complexity and variability of *trova* scholarship. In particular, the authors use varying categorizations for the ever-important genealogy of *trova*: some refer to Varela as a member of the second generation of *nueva trova* while others denote a continuous, yet distinct *novísima trova* movement. This lack of standardization is a testament to the importance of this work; although *trova* is consumed by huge numbers of listeners both in and outside of Cuba, scholarship remains relatively limited.

The book makes an excellent case for Varela’s cultural significance, despite some variability in the strength of the individual essays. Though musical analysis is central in a few chapters, for the most part, lyrical analysis and historical contextualization seem to be the focus. My only criticism is that the book might have benefitted from a slightly more diverse choice of musical examples, as well as some attention to film music—crucial in the development of the first generation of *nueva trova*—in the chapter describing Varela’s writing style as “cinematic.” Nonetheless, it is rich in primary source material, present both in the authors’ own experiences and in the additional content at the end.

*My Havana* reads like a love letter to Carlos Varela. The personal experiences of many of the contributors paint him not just as an important political figure and consummate musician, but as a benevolent person. His music is presented both as aesthetic and as commentary, and readers are given the opportunity to judge for themselves through close reading of the lyrics compiled in the appendix. What the book does best—and what it seems it was set out to achieve—is making a strong case for the inclusion of Carlos Varela in the canon of Cuban musical greats.

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