

**IS IT JUST ABOUT LOVE: FILM AND POLITICS IN PRE-REVOLUTIONARY  
CUBA**

**by**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis is concerned with the role of Filin music in processes of social and political change. It examines how Filin, a style of Cuban urban folk music that developed in Havana in the 1940s and 50s, was constitutive of the historical context in which it developed and consequently, how Filineros expressed their social realities in their songs. Many Filineros were associated with leftist organizations such as the People's Socialist Party, workers' unions, and with underground activism. They lived in times of political upheaval and widespread mobilization preceding the Revolution of 1959. However, their songs' lyrics seem to ignore Filineros' political lives, and focus solely on romance and the intimacy of love. This thesis addresses this paradox: Why does there seem to be such a disjuncture between Filineros' affiliative and oppositional activities and their romantic and self-contained lyrics?

Drawing from Filineros memories, this paper explains Filin lyrics' detachment from the oppositional mobilization the musicians were involved in. First, the repression against communism that followed the post-WWII years in Cuba prevented Filineros from openly expressing their leftist views and activist experiences in their songs' lyrics. Secondly, Filineros understood Filin as a creative outlet and artistic experience, and not as an instrument for political opposition. Thirdly, some of the Filin musicians interviewed believed that music was impotent to create substantial social or political change.

Nevertheless, beyond Filineros' worldview, I argue that Filin songs not only carry aesthetic meaning as expressions of human emotions, but that the practice of Filin constituted them as political actors. Filin gatherings' sequential participatory features,

and consequently, Filin's functions as social entertainer and artistic unifier highlight this music's agency; Filin's uniting power as a musical movement promoted a sense of affiliation among Filineros in which political practices and ideologies were shaped and solidified. In other words, it is through music making that Filineros' ideas, values and ways of life were stimulated and mobilized. As such, Filin music was constitutive of new political identities, and constructed its political relevance more through the context of lived experience than through its musicological traits, its lyrics, or even its musicians' intentions.

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## INTRODUCTION

“Filin”, as described by Cuban musicologist and ethnographer Argeliers León, is a type of Cuban urban folk music that developed throughout the neighbourhoods of Havana in the early 1940s.<sup>1</sup> For its creators, however, it was more than just music; for Filinero José Antonio Méndez “*Filin* means *feeling*, but for us it also meant our epoch, the times we lived.”<sup>2</sup> “Filin emerged the way epidemics emerged. It came out, it sprang up.”<sup>3</sup> Young musicians, simultaneously but independently from each other, began playing and composing in a similar style that transcultured American jazz elements with the Cuban bolero.<sup>4</sup> By the mid 1940s this group of singer-songwriters had found each other, either by word of mouth, or often just by coincidence, and had begun to meet regularly to listen to and play music, and share their compositions. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, their musical gatherings and performances grew in both size and popularity, becoming what we know today as the Filin movement.

As such, the movement has been described not only as a musical movement, but also as a social movement. Many Filineros were associated with communist organizations such as the People’s Socialist Party, and also participated in political mobilizations difficult to avoid in the turmoil of the 1940 and 50s Havana. Yet, their songs’ lyrics are generally romantic, usually associated with the intimacy of love. In César Portillo de la

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<sup>1</sup> Enrique Gonzales Manet, “Aclaran que el Filin No Es Música Decadente,” *El Mundo*, April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1963, cultural section.

<sup>2</sup> José Antonio Méndez interview in Félix Contreras, *Porque Tiene Filin* (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 1989), 8. Filin’s most prominent composers are César Portillo de la Luz and José Antonio Méndez. Other relevant members of the group are Rosendo Ruiz, Níco Rojas, Ángel Díaz, Tania Castellanos, Martha Valdés, Jorge Mazón, Rolando Gómez, Armando Guerrero, Gerardo Piloto, Alberto Vera, Frank Emilio, Frank Domínguez and Luís Yáñez, among others.

<sup>3</sup> Félix Contreras, *La Música Cubana: Una Cuestión Personal* (La Habana: Ediciones Unión, 1999), 54.

<sup>4</sup> Transculturation is a concept first introduced by Cuban anthropologist and ethnomusicologist Fernando Ortiz in 1947 to explain cultural processes that involved the interaction and amalgamation of cultures.

Luz's own words, "romantic songs are one thing and politics is another. You can sing about politics to recreate a political issue, but not to change politics... We were related politically with what was political. Singing was something else."<sup>5</sup> This thesis addresses this paradox.

The Filin movement has been documented by musicologists in several works concerned with Cuban music genres of the 1940s and 1950s. They focus on different topics such as Filin's evolution as part of the *Cancionística Cubana* (Cuban song genre), paying attention to the music's transition from Trova and Bolero to Filin, and then to Nueva Trova. Musicologists have also analyzed Filin songs' structural forms, as well as its organological characteristics.<sup>6</sup> Of special concern is the study of Filin's harmonic and melodic nuances, and its performance features. Other studies narrate the musical trajectory of the movement's prominent singers.<sup>7</sup> In general, these works do not place Filin at the centre, but include it as one among many styles and genres that compose the history of Cuban music.

Even though Filin has not been neglected musicologically, this movement has received little historiographical attention. As Helio Dutra rightly points out, very little has been said of the political, ideological, and social dimension of the Filin movement.<sup>8</sup> However, it is not surprising that cultural historians and other humanities and social science scholars of Cuba have neglected to study the Filin movement. Perhaps the overly

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<sup>5</sup> Personal interview with César Portillo de la Luz, June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009, Havana, Cuba.

<sup>6</sup> Organology is the science of musical instruments and the study of their classification, characteristics, and history.

<sup>7</sup> Cristóbal Díaz Ayala, *Música Cubana: Del Areyto a la Nueva Trova* (Miami, FL: Ediciones Universal, 1993); José Loyola Fernández, *En Ritmo de Bolero: el Bolero en la Música Bailable Cubana* (Havana, Cuba: Ediciones Unión, 1997); Philip Sweeney, *The Rough Guide to Cuban Music: The Rough Guide* (Rough Guides, 2001); Leonardo Acosta, *Elige Tú Que Canto Yo* (Havana, Cuba: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1993); Ned Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2004); Luís Fernández Zaurín, *Biografía de la Trova* (Barcelona: Ediciones B.S.A., 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Helio Dutra, "Filin: Traducción al Sentimiento," *Bohemia*, Dec 7th, 1990.

romantic, seemingly harmless lyrics of Filin songs have not provoked their imagination: music with more overtly or oppositional lyrics receives more attention. Lyrics that speak about issues of rights and freedoms, race, class, poverty and inequality have come to be understood as properly ‘political’ and studied as such. Indeed, Portillo de la Luz echoes this sentiment. Studies of Cuban genres such as Nueva Trova, Timba, or the Rappero movements, which have often been critical of the state’s policies, or involved with the social outcomes of the economic crisis during the *período especial* (special period), have transcended the field of musicology to become the subject of sociological and ethnomusicological investigation.<sup>9</sup> Other Cuban genres of music such as Cha Cha Cha, Mambo or Bolero, whose lyrics are not as engaged with states or governments, have been less popular outside the field of musicology. However, as this study of Filin will show, going beyond the lyrics is crucial, not only to understand this music’s political involvement, but also to advance our understanding of the role of music in social and political change further.

This research, therefore, is situated at the juncture of the disciplines of musicology and history to offer a new interpretation that ‘looks at’, or ‘hears’ the music as a source of historical inquiry, and brings to the front Filin’s social and political significance. In other words, this paper studies Filin as social life. Due to a lack of secondary literature on this topic, this study is based predominantly on personal interviews with members of the Filin movement. I interviewed important Filineros such as Portillo de la Luz, Omara Portuondo, Ela Calvo, Armando Guerrero, and Rosendo

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<sup>9</sup> Robin Moore, *Music and Revolution: Cultural Change in Socialist Cuba* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Vincenzo Perna, *Timba: The Sound of the Cuban Crisis* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005); Sujatha Fernández, “Fear of a Black Nation: Local Rappers, Transnational Crossings, and State Power in Contemporary Cuba,” *Anthropological Quarterly*, 76, No. 4 (2003): 575-608.

Ruiz. My interview with Ruiz was particularly special as he passed away only three weeks after our meeting. These conversations allowed me to ask questions directly related to the issues that are of interest in this study. In addition, Félix Contreras' book *Porque Tiene Filin* was extremely useful.<sup>10</sup> *Porque Tiene Filin* is a collection of interviews conducted by Contreras with the members of the Filin movement. This is perhaps the only book solely dedicated to providing detailed information not only about the music, but also about the social lives, the class struggles, and the ideology and political participation of this group of singer-songwriters. In *Porque Tiene Filin* we see the intimate connection between Filineros' social and political insurgency, on the one hand, and private or personal aesthetic expressions, on the other. There is the concern however that these interviews respond to the political interests of the times and are geared toward highlighting the Filineros' affiliation with the Revolutionary state. They were compiled in the 1980s and published in 1989 (right before the fall of the socialist bloc), a period when people were not just concerned with political retribution, but also had to prove their allegiance to the Castro regime actively. This considered, there are still good reasons to believe that the political sentiments expressed in these interviews are sincere – the Filineros' generation is distinct from my own, which grew up under the socio-economic hardships of the special period, experienced the political and moral decay of the socialist process, and is therefore much more cynical and less committed to the revolutionary project.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Félix Contreras, *Porque Tiene Filin* (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 1989). To supplement Contreras's work, I also used interviews found in historical newspaper articles at the National Museum of Music, and the Centre for Cuban Music Research (CIDMUC). I also did archival research at the special collection and rare books section at the University of Havana's library, the Cuban Institute of History Archive, and the Casa de las Américas' library.

<sup>11</sup> Yoani Sánchez, a Cuban dissident activist, philologist, journalist and creator of the blog Generación Y

During the interview process, Filineros were asked to engage with the question of Filin songs' lyrical content in relation to their historical context. Filin developed as a continuation from the Trova movement that originated in the eastern part of Cuba towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Old Trovadores were politically involved (like Filineros), and their songs, even though generally romantic, often functioned as social barometers, narrating what was happening locally and nationally. Even though Filineros mobilized the Trovadores' singing and song writing tradition, Filin lyrics do not continue the Trova tradition of using music as a medium for making social and political commentary. As such, scholars such as Fredric Jameson have questioned whether music simply replicates and reproduces the social system, or, on the contrary, distances, alienates, and criticizes it.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Peter Wade has argued that music not only grows out of its environment, but also is constitutive of social, racial, and other identities.<sup>13</sup> Based on these theoretical observations, the first part of this study will place Filin music in its socio-historical context. After introducing the origins of the Filin movement and its connection to the Trova movement, I will show how Filin was nourished by the socio-economic space in which it was created. The musicians' social class, and their exposure to a capitalist society permeated and influenced by American products and culture were

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best explains this generational gap: "For the generation that was a conscious witness of the revolutionary triumph and protagonist of the foundational years, the word "antes" (before) means what was previous to 1959. However, those born between the 70s and 80s interpret it in a very different way; for them the revolution is their past. The achievements of the revolutionary process under soviet sponsoring did not produced the messianic salvation effect, because they were born within the revolution's best moment and witnessed its decay. In not feeling 'rescued' of any past evil, it is difficult for them feel identified as beneficiaries of socialism, and this allow them to be more objective and critical. This is the generation that will have in their hands the decision of how the future will be, and in deciding, they won't be able to resort to a 'past' they never lived." <http://www.desdecuba.com/> Yoani Sánchez, written on Jan 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009, Accessed November 11, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Frederick Jamison, "Foreword," in Jaques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xi-4.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Wade, *Music, Race and Nation: Música Tropical in Colombia* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

the creative grounds for Filin's musical experimentation and growth as a new form of aesthetic and musical expression. However, the lyrics of most Filin songs ignored the upheaval that characterized the 1940s and 1950s, some of the years that saw the worst corruption, violence and widespread mobilization preceding the Revolution of 1959. More importantly, Filineros were silent about their own ideological perspectives. Their songs are silent about their contributions to the People's Socialist Party, their participation in workers' unions, their underground activism, and their strong commitment to the ideals of the left. Why does there seem to be such a disjuncture between Filineros' affiliative and oppositional activities and their romantic and self-contained lyrics?

The second part of this essay draws from Filineros' memories to explain Filin lyrics' detachment from the oppositional mobilization the musicians were involved in. First, the repression against communism that followed the post-WWII years in Cuba prevented Filin musicians from openly expressing their leftist views and activist experiences in their songs' lyrics. Secondly, Filineros understood Filin as a creative outlet and artistic experience, and not as an instrument for protest against imperialism, inequality, or corruption. Thirdly, some of the Filin musicians interviewed for this study believed that music was impotent to create substantial social or political change.

As such, an understanding of what is political within the context of this study is not only limited to my interpretation and use of this category, but also to the ways in which the Filineros participating in it understood it. It is my intention to present their perspectives, while also questioning their very use of this category. In general, the Filineros interviewed seemed to view the political as opposite to artistic. My inquiries

about the political dimension of Filin were often received with a degree of reservation. I was often re-directed to the story of the Filin movement that has been written repeatedly, and that my interviewees were evidently used to telling – Filin, an amalgam of the sentiments of the artist; Filin, an amalgam of jazz and Cuban traditions, and so on.

Nevertheless, beyond Filineros' worldview, the third part of this thesis argues that Filin songs not only carry aesthetic meaning as expressions of human emotions, but that the practice of Filin constituted the Filineros as political actors. My analysis is informed by the theoretical frameworks on music and social movements proposed by Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison (1998), as well as Thomas Turino (2008).<sup>14</sup> Turino's framework on participatory music underscores Filin gatherings' sequential participatory features and, consequently, Filin's function as social entertainer and artistic unifier. Furthermore, it highlights this music's agency; Filin's uniting power as a musical and social movement promoted a sense of affiliation among Filineros in which practices and ideologies were shaped and solidified. For Eyerman and Jamison, social movements are interpreted as "central movements in the reconstruction of culture."<sup>15</sup> However, in this case study, Eyerman and Jamison's argument that social movements contribute to processes of cognitive and cultural transformation has been inverted; it was Filineros' process of musical transformation that contributed to social change and mobilization: It was through music making that Filineros' ideas, values and ways of life were stimulated and mobilized. As such, Filin music was constitutive of new political identities, and constructed its political relevance more through the context of lived experience than

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6.

through its musicological traits, its lyrics, or even its musicians' intentions.

## **Filin: A Music and A Historical Moment**

Filin music mobilized old musical and social traditions and infused them with new kinds of meaning. Eyerman and Jamison explain that “social movements do not spring already formed to take place in the stage of history. Rather, they can be conceived of as contingent and emergent spaces which are carved out of existent contexts.” Furthermore, Eyerman and Jamison identify a central social process within the life of the movement: by the mobilization of tradition “in social movements, musical and other kinds of cultural traditions are made and re-made.”<sup>16</sup> Filin, as Ned Sublette, Díaz Ayala, Loyola, Zuarín and many others rightly argue, developed as a continuation of the Trova movement. The new generation of Filineros mobilized the old Trovadores’ tradition of singing – song writing. Following the old Trovadores, they chose to use the guitar (instead of the commonly used piano) to compose and accompany themselves. Their songs, like many Trova songs, were composed in the musical genre of bolero, and were often performed in intimate, small and informal gatherings.<sup>17</sup> This is not surprising, as the familial ties between the generation of Trovadores and the Filineros was strong: some of the Filineros were the sons of old famous Trovadores (Ángel Díaz was the son of Trovador Tirso Díaz, and Rosendo Ruiz Jn. was the son of one of ‘the four greats of Trova’, Rosendo Ruiz), and many Filineros like Portillo de la Luz or José Antonio Méndez knew the work of old Trovadores, and therefore, they were very familiarized with Trova songs.

Filineros’ lives and social circumstances paralleled those of the Trovadores who,

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Lilitana Casanellas Cue, *En Defensa del Texto* (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2004).

like most Filineros, were of humble origins – poor, working class blacks or mulattos, involved in public politics. To name but a few examples: Pepe Sánchez (1856-1918), known as the father of Trova, was involved in the Cuban wars of independence against the Spanish; Sindo Garay (1867-1968), one of the ‘four greats of Trova,’ also participated in the Independence movement couriering messages for the *mambises*.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Patricio Ballagas (1879-1920) was a *mambi* and enlisted in the Liberation army in 1898, and Rosendo Ruiz senior (1885-1983), another of ‘the four greats of Trova’, was a professional tailor of strong communist ideals who participated in syndical activities.<sup>19</sup>

Trovadores earned the reputation of being social commentators and political activists. Rosendo Ruiz (father) for example, composed what is considered the first workers’ anthem in Latin America, *Redención* (Redemption) to be performed by the workers at the celebrations of May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1919 at the Payret Theater in Havana.<sup>20</sup> Sindo Garay’s famous Trova song *Mujer Bayamesa* (The Woman from Bayamo), written in 1918, alludes to the people of Bayamo, who during Cuba's First War of Independence (1868-1878) chose to burn their city instead of allowing the Spanish troops to take it. Similarly, Patricio Ballagas wrote *El Proletario* (The Proletariat), dedicated to the working class, and *Despedida de Recluta* (Recruit’s Farewell) inspired by the recruiting process during WW1, among others.<sup>21</sup>

***Redemption***<sup>22</sup> - Rosendo Ruiz  
Capital and work is the theme

***The Woman from Bayamo*** - Sindo Garay  
The Bayamesa carries in her soul sad memories of

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<sup>18</sup> Mambi(ses) were the name of the Cuban rebels that formed the independence army to fight the Spanish rule.

<sup>19</sup> Ned Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music*, 299.

<sup>20</sup> Evelio Tellería Toca, “Redención, Histórico Himno Obrero,” *Granma*, May 6, 1989.

<sup>21</sup> Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music*, 304. Also in Lino Betancourt, “Patricio Ballagas, El Olvidado”, *Clave*, 4, No 1 (2002): 58.

<sup>22</sup> All translations in this essay are my own. All songs’ original lyrics in Spanish can be found in Appendix A.

Of a thousand fights and agonies  
The evil tyranny will be removed  
It is our duty to defend our honor  
...  
Socialism virile and conscious  
That allows men to live like men  
Its justice will surprise the old centuries  
To defend our honour is our duty.

her traditions ...  
  
But if the motherland calls her  
She leaves everything, she burns everything  
That is her principle, that is her religion.

Filin, like Trova, also had humble origins. Just to name a few examples, Portillo de la Luz was a painter, Méndez was a self-employed musician who did all sorts of extra jobs on the side to survive, and Tania Castellanos was a textile worker. However, some members of the movement such as Ángel Díaz's and Níco Rojas's families were better off and could send their children to university. Like many Trovadores, most Filineros were active in political organizations and identified ideologically with the communist left. For example, Tania Castellanos and Ángel Díaz belonged to the Fraternity of the People's Youth and Fraternity of the Cuban Youth. Other members, such as Rolando Gómez and Méndez, were militant in the Socialist Youth. Jorge Mazón was an affiliated communist, and Justo Fuentes was leader of the University Youth Federation. Their identification with the left often came from their family upbringings – the families of Portillo de la Luz, Rosendo Ruiz, Jorge Mazón, Armando Peñalver, just to name a few, were pro-communist.<sup>23</sup>

These political sentiments further consolidated in the Filineros' musical gatherings, which were not only musically creative or experimental arenas, but also spaces where collective learning occurred. The group was highly influenced ideologically by Lázaro Peña, who was one of Cuba's most important leaders of the People's Socialist Party and Secretary General of the Centre of Cuban Workers (*Central de Trabajadores*

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<sup>23</sup> Contreras, *Porque Tiene Filin*, 1989.

*Cubanos*). He not only used to attend Filin *descargas*,<sup>24</sup> but also hosted several of them at his house.<sup>25</sup> Filinero Jorge Mazón remembers that “Lázaro Peña explained to the Filin group that the music we made was limited by the social conditions, that we made it [the music] simply thinking about our emotions but that capitalism in our country made a merchandise of our art.” Similarly, Tania Castellanos also states that “[Peña] developed within us the class sentiments we had.” He used to tell the group: “you are doubly exploited in this society, because you are black and you are poor, workers or unemployed.”<sup>26</sup>

Through Peña, José Antonio Méndez and Portillo de la Luz, and many other Filineros become close to the People’s Socialist Party (PSP), also known at that time as the Communist Party, and began to attend the party’s Radio Station, *Mil Diez*. At *Mil Diez*, Filineros rehearsed and contributed musically to the station and the party by performing and running musical shows for free. Even though they were not official members of the PSP, they did collateral work to support the party. Méndez and Portillo de la Luz performed regularly, also for free, for the Party’s regular meetings and events,<sup>27</sup> and when the PSP was banned in 1948, many Filineros supported it underground. Portillo de la Luz, Jorge Mazón, Rolando Gómez and Armando Guerrero participated in the clandestine diffusion of the PSP’s weekly newsletter (*carta semanal*).<sup>28</sup> Portillo de la Luz remembers that, “in those times this was considered subversive work. There was a weekly letter written by the party, and it had to be distributed underground to the people. It was a publication for the purpose of proselytizing, so that the people could be informed

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<sup>24</sup> Jam sessions.

<sup>25</sup> Jorge Mazón’s interview in Contreras, *Porque Tiene Filin*, 30.

<sup>26</sup> Tania Castellanos’s interview in Contreras, *Porque Tiene Filin*, 27.

<sup>27</sup> Personal interview with César Portillo de la Luz, June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009, Havana Cuba.

<sup>28</sup> Personal interview with Armando Guerrero, May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009, Havana Cuba.

of the things that had to do with their lives as workers, and so that they knew what the PSP was, how they could help the party and vice versa.”<sup>29</sup>

One of most politically dedicated Filineros was Tania Castellanos. She participated in rebellious outreach activities: “We went to the movies at Radio Cine and when it was full of people, we filled the room with flyers that denounced the injustices of those times.” Castellanos was also a member of the textile workers’ union. She used to collect funds from the workers and donate them in support of the PSP.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Jorge Mazón was also involved in underground activities: “I was always an affiliated communist... My house served to keep communist propaganda: signs, flyers, posters, and all that we took to the rallies and demonstrations.”<sup>31</sup>

Filineros’ musical activity provided spaces for social and political growth. Their commitment to the left and opposition to Cuba’s capitalist system grew when experiencing the poor ways musicians were treated in pre-Revolutionary Cuban society. Their fight against capitalism was channelled through their fighting of the American recording companies. Around the late 1940s, Rosendo Ruiz was fired from his office job at the Music Editorial Peer & CIA, a branch of Southern Music in New York, because he began denouncing through the radio, press, and other media the ways in which this corporation was exploiting Cuban music and its musicians. Some of the media he used to create awareness were the *Flecha Autoral* section of the newspaper *Pueblo*, the Film Report section of the *Cine Periódico* (Cinema Newspaper), the magazine *Gente* (People), and TV programs such as *Paso a la Juventud*, and Channel 4, among others. Ruiz was also expelled from the *Sociedad Nacional de Autores de Cuba* (SNAC) because he was

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<sup>29</sup> Personal interview with César Portillo de la Luz, June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009, Havana Cuba.

<sup>30</sup> Tania Castellanos’s interview in Contreras, *Porque Tiene Filin*, 28.

<sup>31</sup> Jorge Mazón’s interview in Contreras, *Porque Tiene Filin*, 39.

considered ‘progressive’, in this case meaning of leftist ideology.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, under the advice of Pena, Filineros decided to organize and create Musicabana at the beginning of the 1950s. Musicabana was an editorial company whose purpose was to protect the musicians’ works against the major record companies such as Panart, or the Music Editorial Peer & CIA, the biggest record company in Cuba, which used to buy musicians’ works for very low prices. The editorial company supported many emerging musicians who did not have anywhere to publish their music.

We did not reject anybody and we not only published Filin songs but also other styles of music...One of the first meetings to found the editorial happened at the premises of the journal *Hoy* (Today), which was the official newspaper of the Socialist Popular Party. We registered the editorial as an association and clearly we stated our ideological position by registering the address of the administration office of Musicabana at one of the offices owned by the Popular Socialist Party.<sup>33</sup>

Musicabana’s role, in Filineros’ eyes, was to fight the American monopolies and by extension, capitalism. Portillo de la Luz remembers how “transnationals made agreements, or contracts with the musicians at 50% of the earnings. These companies ransacked us to the very last coin. That is why Musicabana was created.”<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, Filin’s case study expands Eyerman and Jamison’s premise that social movements provide spaces for musical growth and experimentation. In fact, it is through music that new forms of political knowledge and praxis were produced. Filineros’ musical activity led to the creation of Musicabana. It also led to Filineros’ political education through Pena, and to their participation in the PSP and other activism. It was the Filineros’ musical mobilization that promoted their social and political growth, and the infusion of new kinds of political meanings to their lives.

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<sup>32</sup> Rosendo Ruiz, “Informe: Al Primer Ministro del Gobierno Revolucionario Cmdt Fidel Castro.” Consejo Nacional de Cultura (Council for National Culture) Nov, 1972. Document found in the Filin Collection of the Archive of the National Museum of Music, Cuba, in May, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Rosendo Ruiz’s interview in Contreras, *Porque Tiene Filin*, 32-33.

<sup>34</sup> César Portillo de la Luz in Contreras, *Porque Tiene Filin*, 13.

Yet, unlike the Trovadores, the Filineros focused their lyrics generally on the many shades of love and romantic emotions. They “had the amorous optimism of youth...and often were simple, direct, ethereal expressions of love and satisfaction with an exalted diction of sentiments.”<sup>35</sup> For Portillo de la Luz, Filin lyrics bring forward “the sincerity of love, timelessness and universality of love, the mix of joy and sadness that we feel when we are in love.”<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Ariana Orejuela explains that “with the idea of emancipating the Cuban romantic song from commonly used metaphors (enchanted eyes, pearl teeth, guitar bodies), these authors created lyrics that are realistic regarding the couple’s love, and the image of women is portrayed differently, what is loved is not the beauty of her eyes, her mouth or body, but that she is loved for what she is.”<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Liliana Castanellos describes how in Filin songs “language becomes more colloquial, and uses simple images instead of metaphoric allusions. The man’s discourse is tender and gallant, and often men are portrayed as the source of happiness and love for the woman...The theme of separation is addressed but the image of the loved woman is not hurt or talked about in an accusatory language.”<sup>38</sup> Portillo de la Luz’s *Contigo en la Distancia*, (With you in the Distance), and José Antonio Méndez’s *Novia Mía* (My Bride), which are among the most famous Filin songs, give us a flavour of Filin's lyric style.

***Contigo en la Distancia*** – César Portillo de la Luz      ***My Bride*** – Jose Antonio Méndez

There is not one moment in the day  
In which I can be away from you  
The world seems different

My bride,  
since the first and faithful embrace  
My dark and cruel melancholy

<sup>35</sup> Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music*, 528.

<sup>36</sup> César Portillo de la Luz’s interview in Rebeca Ullos, “Una Hermosa Historia de Amor: En los 50 Años de Contigo en la Distancia,” *Bolerazo*, May 1999.

<sup>37</sup> Adriana Orejuela, *El Son No Se Fue De Cuba*. (La Habana, Cuba: Letras Cubanas, 2006), 65.

<sup>38</sup> Castanellas, *En Defensa del Texto*, 72.

If you are not with me  
...  
You have become part of my soul  
Nothing pleases me if you are not here  
Beyond your lips, the sun and the stars  
With you in the distance  
I am.

was forever buried  
...  
I am not fearful of going  
unrestrained to the abyss  
if you don't push me  
away from your bosom,  
bride of all my selfishness.

During my research I have only encountered two songs with lyrics that have double meanings. One is “*En Nosotros*” (In Us), by Tania Castellanos, and “*Me Faltabas Tú*” (I Was Missing You) by José Antonio Méndez.

*En Nosotros* (In Us)- Tania Castellanos

When you leave me, the song of my soul will follow you  
the echo of my love in your memories  
that's why in vain you will go  
you will continue to love me  
...

*Me Faltabas Tú* (I was Missing You) –José Antonio Méndez

I was missing love, I was missing peace, I was missing you  
Who was going to think that I could love today deeper than yesterday  
...

Even though “*En Nosotros*” appears to be about a relationship break up, Castellanos wrote this song to her partner Lázaro Peña when he had to leave Cuba to go into exile to the USSR to escape from the government’s repression against communism.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, “*Me Faltabas Tú*” seems to be about missing and needing the loved one. However, what is missed in Méndez’s lyrics is his country. He writes “*Me Faltabas Tú*” when he returns to Cuba from Mexico in 1959 and dedicates the song to Cuba and the Revolution.<sup>40</sup> However, these two songs are an exception. In general, Filineros wrote romantic songs that – though they might be heard in any number of ways – they insisted were straightforwardly and simply about love.

To understand why Filin lyrics focus mainly on romance however, this paper

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<sup>39</sup> Personal interview with Omara Portuondo, May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2009, Havana, Cuba.

<sup>40</sup> Orlando Castellanos, *Entrevista con José Antonio Méndez* (La Habana, Cuba: Ediciones Unión, 1992), 7.

argues that it is crucial to move beyond the lyrics and into Filineros' lives and historical circumstances. In doing so, it becomes clear how Filin was a response to Filineros' socio-economic and political context. These and the urban environment of this young group determined the ways in which Filineros created music: where they experienced it; what instruments they used; what they listened to that provided them with the aural experiences needed to create a new style of Cuban song; and ultimately, what kind of lyrics they wrote, and why they wrote them in the way they did.

Filineros' financial reach was a determinant in the way Filineros organized their *descargas*. Playing and making music was an economically accessible form of entertainment for the young Filineros, whose financial resources were very limited. Most members of the group could not afford to go to nightclubs or other costly youth entertainment options. Gathering at some of the Filineros' houses, meeting at Havana's *malecon*, parks, or as Sublette mentions, "wherever guitar players could congregate"<sup>41</sup> was an affordable option within the group's economic reach. Portillo de la Luz remembers: "Sometimes I didn't have the 10 cents to pay for the *tertulia*<sup>42</sup> or for the movies and I had to stay home. Therefore I would go to my guitar and compensated for this lost opportunity by making music."<sup>43</sup>

The 'return' to the guitar, in a piano-dominated musical environment was also a question of class. In one of Armando Peñalver's testimonials he explains that "buying a guitar was much cheaper than buying a piano. The guitar has always belonged to the people. If you are really short on money you can even make one yourself."<sup>44</sup> A guitar

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<sup>41</sup> Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music*, 528.

<sup>42</sup> Artistic gathering.

<sup>43</sup> Osvaldo Valdés Mejías, "Habla César Portillo de la Luz," *Revolución*, January 1963.

<sup>44</sup> Armando Peñalver's interview in Contreras, *Porque Tiene Filin*, 48.

could be bought for \$5. Also, Filin singers were the sons of artisans or workers, meaning they could make their own guitars from a piece of discarded wood.<sup>45</sup>

Filin's development as a new style of Cuban song was conditioned by its urban setting, and Havana's media and technological networks. In Portillo de la Luz' own words, "we were a generation that greets the advent of the radio, the recording industry, the sound movie, all that media that brought us information from all the world and enriched our musical understanding."<sup>46</sup> In their *descargas* they listened to and played all kinds of music: Cuban *sones*<sup>47</sup> and Trova songs, classical music, and especially, American Jazz, which highly influenced Filineros' compositions.

One of the musical genres that Filineros preferred to listened to was American music, and this is not a coincidence. The Filineros' urban society was politically, economically and culturally influenced by the United States. Havana was inundated with American products, which were advertised and consumed daily.<sup>48</sup> American music was one more commodity consumed through the already extensive media sources such as the radio, the *vitrolas*, and the movies and music records that arrived in Cuba from the United States. Filin songs were highly influenced by American Jazz musicians such as Benny Goodman, Dizzy Gillespie, Billy Holliday, Nat King Cole and many others.<sup>49</sup> They represent a process of transculturation that merged Cuban Bolero songs with American Jazz, resulting in a new and unique way of composing and interpreting Cuban

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<sup>45</sup> Contreras, *Porque Tiene Filin*, 65.

<sup>46</sup> César Portillo de la Luz's interview in Contreras 1989, 12.

<sup>47</sup> Son is a style of Cuban music that originated in the eastern provinces of Cuba and became popular in the 1920s. It amalgamates both Spanish and African musical roots.

<sup>48</sup> The American economic and cultural hegemony stands out in magazines of the 1940s and 50s such as *Carteles*, *Bohemia*, where advertisements of American news, products and forms of live were included in almost every other page of every edition. For further analysis look at Louis Perez Jr.' book, *On Becoming Cuban*.

<sup>49</sup> Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music*, 525.

Boleros: Filin songs' harmonies, highly influenced by Jazz, were much more complex and sophisticated than those previously used in the traditional Trova and Bolero songs. Rather than playing simple triad chords, Filin songs' harmonies take from Jazz harmonical chord structures and begin to use extensions and augmented chords, which resulted in richer harmonies for the accompaniments. The accompaniments in the guitar also leave behind the typical *rasgado* (strumming) to use a freer accompaniment that is more melodic and includes systems of arpeggios and rhythmic patterns. Their melodies had big intervallic movements that could capture and transmit the singer's emotions. Their new way of singing was very expressive, with long melodic pauses.<sup>50</sup> Symbolic of this process of transculturation is the name of the movement itself. Filin is the Hispanized version of the English word *feeling*. Filineros took the word *feeling* from the musical term *feeling* used in Jazz music scores, when musicians are expected to play a specific part in a very expressive way, conveying emotions. They began to use the word *filin* in their colloquial everyday language to describe not just the music but "everything that was 'good and modern'",<sup>51</sup> just as what was coming from the U.S. was usually considered modern in most of the republican years in Cuba.

At the same time, Filin seems to wilfully ignore the social unrest and urban violence that was part of daily existence in 1940's and 1950's Havana. The Filin movement grew hand in hand with Cuba's political instability. Civil unrest began to escalate during the 1940s, culminating in the high levels of political violence that marked Cuba throughout the 1950s. Under the governments of Grau San Martín and Prío Socarrás Cuba lived through years of political demoralization and degeneration. Havana

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<sup>50</sup> Zaurín, *Biografía de la Trova*, 82.

<sup>51</sup> José Antonio Méndez's interview in Contreras, *Porque Tiene Filin*, 8.

was a city of vice, unemployment and corruption. Louis Perez Jr. best describes the situation: “Embezzlement, graft, and malfeasance of public office permeated every branch of national, provincial, and municipal government...Politics passed under the control of party thugs, and a new word entered the Cuban political lexicon: *gangsterismo*. Violence and terror became extensions of party politics and the hallmark of Auténticos’ rule.”<sup>52</sup>

The 1950s were not any better. On the contrary, Batista’s *coup d’état* in 1952 not only continued but also intensified corruption. Even worse, it opened an era of unrestrained military repression and violence. Pianist Bebo Valdés, who was associated with the members of Filin movement, remembers the situation in the 1950s:

Well, with all the bombs sounding we didn’t know if it was six, seven o’clock, what time it was. There was a time when you couldn’t go with your children to the movies — at the movie theatre in Belascoain, near the police station, they planted a bomb that went off during a matinee. No one was hurt in that one, but bombs exploded everywhere. You couldn’t go outside, it was terrible. I had experienced some of that in the time of Machado,<sup>53</sup> but not to the same extent.<sup>54</sup>

Batista’s regime is known for the suspension of constitutional guarantees, the use of the military and the police force to exert political control, and by quotidian open displays of brutality. Underground youth groups’ heighten their efforts to fight the dictatorship. The clash between these two forces transformed the life of most Cuban cities into centres of civil unrest and violence. However, Filin songs bypassed this social upheaval. The next part of this paper draws from Filineros’ memories to explain this silence.

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<sup>52</sup> Louis Perez Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 284.

<sup>53</sup> Gerardo Machado was president of Cuba between 1925-33, which was terminated by a popular uprising and subsequent withdrawal of U.S. support after a period of civil war.

<sup>54</sup> Ned Sublette, “Bebo Valdés” *Boom Magazine*, Winter, 2002, <http://www.bombsite.com/issues/78/articles/2461> (Accessed March 15, 09).

## Why Filin Was ‘Just About Love’: Three Answers To The Puzzle

When asked why, the Filineros interviewed for this study disclosed that they did not write political lyrics that reflected their leftist views, nor the heated social times they were living through because they thought it was detrimental to their professional development as musicians. In particular, they referred to the risks involved in openly declaring one’s communist affiliation and opposition to the regime.

After WW2, the repression against communism escalated throughout the world and the situation in Cuba, so politically close to the US, was no different. The PSP was banned in 1948 and soon their communist leaders began to be not only persecuted but also killed. For example, Jesús Menéndez and Aracelio Iglesias were assassinated in 1948 and many of the communist leaders during the next decade had to go into exile in the USSR. As Armando Guerrero says: “Why would you write political songs in those times [1940s-50s]? Where could you have sung them?”<sup>55</sup> Portillo de la Luz reinforces these sentences: “In those years it was not possible to make political expressions through the arts because you would go to jail if you wrote political songs against the interests of the government in power.” Remembering the risks involved in being involved with the communist leaders he adds: “Sometimes we were in Lázaro Pena’s car. It was Lázaro, the driver El Moro, and José Antonio [Méndez], Yáñez and I on the back to protect Lázaro because it is not the same to shoot at two people than to shoot at five. But the ones who had guns were Lázaro and El Moro, Neither José Antonio, Yáñez nor I had a pistol.”<sup>56</sup>

Filineros knew that if they expressed their political standpoint through their song

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<sup>55</sup> Personal interview with Armando Guerrero, May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009, Havana Cuba.

<sup>56</sup> Personal interview with Portillo de la Luz, June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009, Havana Cuba.

lyrics their careers would have been affected, losing their ability to sing and promote their songs. Portillo de la Luz confirms:

Everyone who was a communist was at a disadvantage in finding jobs. I worked as a musician at the bar of the casino Sans Souci. There were two big casinos, Tropicana and Sans Souci, run by Santo Trafficante Jnr., a mafioso. And do you think that a mafioso would be interested in hiring a communist singer to work and sing leftist songs at the casino? This is why Lázaro Peña had advised Filineros not to become official members of the PSP, because he thought it would have been professionally disadvantageous for the musicians. He [Peña] preferred that we perform collateral work with the party, because if we became official members we would have to do political work that would signal us to the authorities, and that was not convenient for us professionally.<sup>57</sup>

Indeed, singing about the ideals of the left was not only inconvenient, but also risky.

In addition, to understand the romantic nature of Filin it is also necessary to take into consideration that by the time the Filin movement emerged, the commercialization and international popularization of Bolero had undermined Trova's grassroots nature and with it, its political edges. By the late 1930s and 1940s, the Bolero songs that had originated with the Trovadores in the rural parts of eastern Cuba towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had not only moved to the Cuban urban settings, but had become an international phenomenon. Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Boleros had spread throughout Latin America, becoming extremely commercial through the movies and recording industry. Trova's role as social commentator disappeared in this process of internationalization and commercialization. Therefore, the popular Boleros contemporary to Filineros, which they listened to on the radio, at the *vitrolas* and the movies, and which they were later to transform, were overly romantic songs completely emptied of overt political expression.

In general, Filineros understood music as a form of entertainment, an artistic outlet, and a creative and aesthetic phenomenon, not as an instrument for political change. Both Portillo de la Luz as well as Méndez separated their profession as musicians from their

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

ideologies. “If a radio station that was not communist gave us work, why wouldn’t we sing, if they paid? If I was paid to play at cabaret Sans Souci, why not do it? I didn’t need to wait for the owner of the casino – who was a trafficker by the way – to be a communist for me to play there.” He continues: “This is the way I mix politics with arts: currently I donate money to the Ministry of Health, or to the Ministry of Culture to make a documentary in defence of the Five Heroes. I use the money I make as an artist to do politics. I do politics with political actions.”<sup>58</sup> Likewise, when José Antonio Méndez composed “La Gloria Eres Tú” (You Are The Glory) his song was censored and banned from being recorded and performed, because the lyrics were thought to be religiously offensive: “I refute God because by having you on earth / I don’t need to go to heaven, if you, my soul, are my glory.” Therefore, he changed “I refute God” to “I bless God”, as if the religious stand conveyed in the lyrics was irrelevant. “That way I made money, because ultimately, my economic situation was very difficult, and that way I made some income. It was not that I abandoned my principles, it is that it was difficult to survive in that society.”<sup>59</sup>

And what the Filineros wanted was to sing. Making music was a form of entertainment, an artistic outlet, and a creative and aesthetic phenomenon. From its very beginning, Filineros were chiefly brought together by their shared desire to explore and experiment with music. The process of musical creation and conscious transculturation were the driving force of their reunions. For this young group, the Filin gatherings were the place for disclosing one’s profound emotions and transmitting them through music. Frank Dominguez explains that “Filin is the expression of a state of being, or

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with José Antonio Méndez in Contreras, *Porque Tiene Filin*, 10.

sentiment...it is like conversing with one's own feelings.”<sup>60</sup> The more expressive the performance of the song was, the most artistic and aesthetic value it had for the group. Níco Rojas explained how in the *descargas*, Filineros sang the songs “differently each time, the way you feel it each time. When someone sang a song and we liked it, we asked the musician to play it again, and he had to invent something on the guitar to make it different, without repeating himself. On Monday you sang this way, on Tuesday in another way, on Wednesday another way, always changing depending on the mood.”<sup>61</sup>

If they continued to assert that their lyrics were apolitical, their music-making sessions enacted a counter-politics of freedom and equality. The intense necessity to articulate their emotions led Filineros to create their music in ways that allowed for expressive freedom. Their performances were often declamatory. They do not use the verb *to sing*, instead they use the verb *to say* to describe what they do. As Rosendo Ruiz declares, “More than singing we express, we say, allowing freedom for the interpreter.”<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Filineros generally do not accompany themselves with percussion instruments, commonly used in most Cuban music genres and ensembles of the time such as the big dance orchestras, the jazz bands and the *charangas*. The purpose of leaving out the percussion was to attain more expressive and declamatory liberties. Filineros understood the percussion section as a “rhythmic jail that often prevents the expressive freedom that Filin singers wanted to achieve. The Filin singer only needs a guitar to say, more than sing, what he wants.”<sup>63</sup>

By being expressive, by letting go of one’s emotions, the Filin movement was a

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<sup>60</sup> Frank Dominguez interview in Contreras, *Porque Tiene Filin*, 53-55.

<sup>61</sup> Níco Rojas interview in Contreras, *Porque Tiene Filin*, 46.

<sup>62</sup> Rosendo Ruiz’s interview in Casanellas, *En Defensa del Texto*, 71.

<sup>63</sup> Orejuela, *El Son No Se Fue*, 66.

social and artistic experience that provided this youth group with a gateway where Filineros left behind the burdens of their everyday struggles. By concentrating on the pleasures of music making, and the romance of the themes, musicians could find a refuge from the social context surrounding them. Making art and expressing their sentiments through music was a release valve in which they found relief. Portillo de la Luz explains: “We let ourselves be carried by our emotions. It was our emotional equilibrium and stability. The enjoyment of what we did, induced us to create in that way. It was the only thing we had in a society in which you could not aspire to any economic security...Our major delight we had was the enjoyment in making art in the way we felt it.”<sup>64</sup> To sing about love, to sing about the joy of life was Filineros' way to face and respond to a harsh reality. Portillo de la Luz, in an interview with Radamés Giro, explains how the Filineros' musical creativity was a reflection of their “need to face life itself.”<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, Rosendo Ruiz confesses that “Filin emerges at a moment when people, the youth, felt enslaved by a series of hard socioeconomic realities within the country. It is then that people use music as a form of expression, because music helps achieve freedom.”<sup>66</sup>

In her book *The Quest for Voice: On Music, Politics, and the Limits of Philosophy*, Lydia Goehr argues that singing “is a fundamental act of human expression of shared aesthetic and political significance.”<sup>67</sup> She builds her analysis on literature from the 18th century to the present. Her account explores philosophers such as Rousseau, who interpreted singing – or vocal expression – as a “shared source of human community on the one hand and of music's significance, on the other. The inexpressible moral or

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<sup>64</sup> César Portillo de la Luz's interview in Contreras, *Porque Tiene Filin*, 12.

<sup>65</sup> Radamés Giró, *El Filin: César Portillo de la Luz* (Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1997), 35.

<sup>66</sup> Rosendo Ruiz's interview in Contreras, *Porque Tiene Filin*, 35.

<sup>67</sup> Lydia Goehr, *The Quest for Voice: On Music, Politics, and the Limits of Philosophy* (Clarendon Press, 1998), 89.

passional basis of expression that inspires acts of singing is commensurate with the inspiration behind public speaking within which lies the potential for human freedom.”<sup>68</sup> Singing about altruistic and pure love, and capturing the amorous optimism of youth seems to have been the central impulse of the Filineros’ community. But behind the surface of their seemingly romantic songs laid the desire for freedom, facilitated through music. Their freedom comes from singing. Their frustrations go away with singing. Their everyday life struggles are replaced by the romance and joy invoked in their songs. The apparently silent political voice of the Filin songs comes out in the words of love.

Goehr also explores more recent scholars such as Levi-Strauss, Barthes and Derrida. These thinkers have analysed how the aesthetic and political is connected “via passion-inspired acts of voiced and embodied expression. Thinking about the repressed political voice, thinking that finds embodied and often artistic expression the source and site for the liberation of that otherwise silent voice.”<sup>69</sup> Filineros' songs are passion-inspired acts, and their community a space for liberation. Their political voice – although silent in their lyrics – is embodied in their need for artistic expression and communication. Their songs are the inspiration needed to achieve altruist ideals related to love. The absence of an avowedly “political” voice in their lyrics belies a strong political standpoint nonetheless: is it a coincidence that sentiments of love and open expressions of joy are opposed to repression and violence? Their music is a source of inspiration and a form of catharsis. In the creative and emotionally fulfilling environment of their musical gatherings, Filineros found inspiration, through ideals of love, affection and altruism to mobilize and contribute to change the social and political circumstances of their lives.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

## Social and Political Significance of Filin Music

The broader social significance of Filineros' musical meetings lies in the social interactions and civic conversations that developed around the music. As such, Filin's social role can be better explained by looking at how Filin *descargas* took place. Even though with time Filin songs began to be also performed in concert type settings as *presentational performance music*,<sup>70</sup> Filin movement's *descargas* are best described by what Thomas Turino has called *sequential participatory performances*. These are special artistic practices where there are no artist-audience distinctions, only participants and potential participants performing different roles. In these *sequential* participatory performances everyone takes a turn alone, or smaller groups perform for one another in the event. These gatherings are framed as interactive social occasions, where music is the central activity during the social gathering, and anyone and everyone is welcome to perform. Therefore, participatory music is highly democratic, and the least hierarchical. Furthermore, Turino rightly argues that the direct involvement of members in participatory music creates a special sense of social synchrony, bonding and identity.<sup>71</sup> In Filin's inclusive *descargas*, music connected the individual to the community, promoted solidarity, and created meanings and spaces for imagining possibilities. For instance, Tania Castellanos remembers when she met the Filineros' group at *Mil Diez*, "I loved music and singing. That way I got close to them [the Filin group], realizing that they had

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<sup>70</sup> Turino calls *presentational performance music* to music that is performed in a concert setting where there is a defined audience 'receiving' or listening to the music performed by a musician or a group of performers. As such there is a separation between the stage where the performance is taking place and the audience.

<sup>71</sup> Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 26-49.

so much political and musical affinity with me.”<sup>72</sup>

Turino’s analysis of the social relevance of sequential participatory music gatherings is further developed by the theories of Robert D. Putnam. Putnam argues that apolitical associations can be politically motivating and provide citizens with skills that can be used for political purposes. “Networks of social interaction and civic engagement foster sturdy norms of generalised reciprocity and encourage the emergence of social trust. Such networks facilitate co-ordination and communication, amplify reputations, and thus allow dilemmas of collective action to be resolved.”<sup>73</sup> The Filin movement gatherings – an example of such networks of apolitical engagement – were politically motivating and provided Filineros with skills that could be used for their political work. The Filin movement’s musical gatherings enhanced their participants’ organisational and communicative skills that could be transferred to their own activism.

An example of this is the way Filineros directed the editorial *Musicabana*. Filinero Armando Peñalver recounts that “*Musicabana* worked as a cooperative. Everything was discussed in a collective way, through regular meetings.”<sup>74</sup> Similarly, Filineros’ political ideology also conditioned how they organized their rehearsals. For example, when the group *Loquibambia*, formed in 1947 by José Antonio Méndez, Omara Portuondo, Eligio Valera, Leonel Brabet, Alberto Menéndez, and Frank Emilio met at *Mil Diez* to rehearse, the sessions were also done in a collective, egalitarian way. In the words of Frank Emilio when describing the rehearsal process: “we all directed, arranged, decided the assembling

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<sup>72</sup> Tania Castellanos interview in Contreras, *Porque Tiene Filin*, 27.

<sup>73</sup> Robert D. Putnam, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital,” *Journal of Democracy*, 6, No 1 (1995): 65-78.

<sup>74</sup> The leadership of *Musicabana* was formed by Jose Antonio Mendez (president), Luis Yañez (treasurer), and Jorge Mazón, Pablo Reyes, Armando Guerrero, Alberto Vera, and Giraldo Piloto. Contreras, *Porque Tiene Filin*, 50.

and montage of the music.”<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, after the Revolution triumphed in 1959, and after Filin passed the ideological scrutiny of the state, several Filineros took important leadership positions in the new revolutionary government. For example, El Niño Rivera became part of the board of directors of the Society of Authors of Cuba.<sup>76</sup> Alberto Reyes, brother of Ángel Díaz, became member of the Revolutionary Armed Forces.<sup>77</sup> Martha Valdéz worked for the Government’s Board of the Cuban Institute of Musical Rights (*Junta de Gobierno del Instituto Cubano de Derechos Musicales*), was Vice President of the Cuban Society of Musical Authors (*Sociedad Cubana de Autores Musicales*) and President of the Popular Music Division of UNEAC (*Sección de Música Popular of UNEAC*).<sup>78</sup>

The Filin movement’s gatherings played an important role in creating a sense of unity in which the musicians' political ideologies could solidify. Zaurín describes how the gatherings at Ángel Díaz’s, one of Filin’s main gathering places, were attended by leaders of the PSP. “Therefore, there was often conspiracy while there was singing.”<sup>79</sup> Filin's uniting power promoted a sense of political affiliation among Filineros. Furthermore, and basing my argument on Turino’s sequential participatory music theory, and Putnam's idea that networks of social interaction are likely to broaden the participants' sense of self, developing the "I" into the "we",<sup>80</sup> I argue that through the sharing of this apparently apolitical music, existing relationships and sense of ideological

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<sup>75</sup> Mayra Martínez, “Frank Emilio, Aprendiz y Maestro,” *Música Moderna Cubana*, June, 1989.

<sup>76</sup> Leonardo Acosta, “Niño Rivera, El Gran Olvidado de la Música Cubana,” Newspaper clip from Félix Contreras’s personal collection, Havana, Cuba, May 2009.

<sup>77</sup> Contreras, *Porque Tiene Filin*, 22.

<sup>78</sup> Biographical document found at the Filin Collection of Archive of the National Museum of Music in Havana, Cuba, May 2009.

<sup>79</sup> Zaurín, *Biografía de la Trova*, 85.

<sup>80</sup> Putnam, “Bowling Alone,” 65-78.

belonging among the musicians and listeners became stronger. Sharing similar race, class and ideology, all intimately tied through the sharing of similar musical interests created a sense of “we”, a sense of shared identity. The intimacy in which this music was performed – soft songs on the guitar in small gatherings – was also conducive to the transmission and solidification of political ideas.

And music's ability to bring people together, that autonomous power music plays within the collective, has been recognized since the times of Plato. Yet it has often been ignored in works that study the relationship between music and social change. As mentioned before, these works are often concerned about the songs' lyrics and their link to the transmission of movements' ideals. However, Eyerman and Jamison argue that because music is lived as well as thought, it draws on more emotive aspects of human consciousness. It recalls a meaning that lies “outside and beyond the self”, providing a feeling of belonging, a part in the collective's vision. The emotive language, melodies and rhythms are carried through performance practices that merge the musical with the political. To articulate this dimension of music, Eyerman and Jamison borrow from Raymond Williams's theory of structure of feelings. They argue that the construction of meaning through music and song is a central component in the creation of collective identity. Cultural traditions, the past in the present, are a powerful source of inspiration for social movements. They carry structures of feelings that are “embodied and preserved in and through music”. Music as a structure of feeling creates moods and in this way can communicate a feeling of common purpose, of belonging even for those with no connection with one another.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Eyerman and Jamison, *Music and Social Movements*, 160-172.

Eyerman and Jamison's idea of music as a form of structure of feeling can be further explained by Turino's theories. He argues that music can communicate emotions and meaning if it is understood as a kind of sign. Music can have iconic meaning: "a musical sound spurs imaginative connections of resemblance between the musical sounds and everyday experienced sounds. Iconic connections ignite the imagination by suggesting resemblance with other things outside of music." Music is iconic of mood and therefore triggers feelings or imagination.<sup>82</sup> Also, music has index meaning and creates indexical connections between the sign (music) and the object (person, moment, event, etc). Musical indices potentially create a "semantic snowballing": the association of music with specific lived experiences which add historical depth and emotional power to people's lives.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, music has the capacity to mobilize memories, emotions and feelings, which can potentially inspire people to mobilize and pursue social change. Music's ability to solidify people's collective identity, their political ideologies and behaviours, ultimately results in actions geared towards social transformation. In and of itself, Filin's political autonomy lies in its power to create associations, in its power to bring people together through the experience of music. As such, Filin does not need to refer explicitly to regimes, politicians, or the organized opposition to contribute to social and political change.

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<sup>82</sup> Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 6-8.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 8-9.

## CONCLUSION

Filin music was constitutive of Filineros' political identities, and constructed its political relevance more through the context of lived experience than through its musicological traits and its lyrics. It is ironic that contrary to many Filineros' understanding of music being impotent to create social and political change, right after the triumph of the revolution in 1959, their music was accused of taking side with the ideals of American capitalism, and corruption. Because Filin songs were highly influenced by Jazz, the music was called decadent, and Filineros were nicknamed *los enfermos* ('the sickos'). The accusations reached their climax when government official García Gallo 'accused' Filinera Ela O'Farril's song "Goodbye Happiness" of displaying mean sentiments and potentially serving counterrevolutionary interests.<sup>84</sup> Her song was thought to have double meanings when saying 'goodbye to happiness' – the happiness lost with the advent of Socialism in Cuba.

Many newspaper articles were written in Cuban popular magazines such as *Bohemia*, *El Mundo*, and *Revolución*, in defence of the Filineros. For example Enrique Manet writes: "It has been clarified that Filin is not a decadent music."<sup>85</sup> Others, such as Ángel Pou, justify that Filin's American influence is neither pernicious nor ideologically negative. "Filin comes carrying these [American] 'smells', but to assume that American music in general has more to do with the people of Wall Street than with the real people of the US is a terrible exaggeration. We think that [Filin] has to do with the blacks of the

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<sup>84</sup> *Bohemia*, "Ela Tiene Filin," April 19, 1963. Newspaper clip found in the Filin Collection of the Archive of the National Museum of Music, Havana, Cuba, in May, 2009.

<sup>85</sup> Enrique Gonzales Manet, "Aclaran Que El Filin No Es Música Decadente," *El Mundo*, April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1963, Cultural section, daily edition.

South, persecuted and segregated.”<sup>86</sup> Another UNEAC publication writes, “Since time immemorial, Cuban music has been influenced by foreign movements...The influence of American music in our ‘feeling’ is powerful but good,” and “Filin was not a decadent manifestation but a renewal force, a creative and direct message.”<sup>87</sup>

It was not until 1963 that the harsh ideological accusations against Filin were put to rest, when UNEAC organized a ‘Forum about Filin’ so that the elite intellectuals of those times such as Alejo Carpentier and Argeliers León could determine whether Filin was ideologically pernicious or not. Finally Filin was absolved, ‘officialized’ and received the complete support of the young Cuban authorities.<sup>88</sup> Could Filineros have predicted that their music, so ‘romantically innocent’, was going to become the target of political accusations and the cause of so much discussion? As such, music – that mysterious thing that is somehow more than its parts, the rhythms, the melodies, the structures, and the tempos – transcends the intentions of the musicians, its musicological traits, and its lyrics and carries on, inspiring new meanings through the context of lived experience.

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<sup>86</sup> Ángel Pou, “Incurción al Filin,” *El Mundo*, April 16<sup>th</sup>, 1963.

<sup>87</sup> UNEAC, “Iniciado Fórum Sobre Filin,” Newspaper clip found in the Archive of the National Museum of Music, Havana, Cuba, in May, 2009.

<sup>88</sup> *Revolución*, “Cuando Filin Tiene Filin,” June 16, 1963. Newspaper clip found in the Archive of the National Museum of Music, Havana, Cuba, in May, 2009.

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## APPENDIX A

The following are the original Spanish lyrics of the samples of the songs presented as examples in the essay.

### Redención

*Rosendo Ruiz (Snr.)*

Capital y trabajo es el lema  
de mil luchas y mil agonías  
que se extirpe la vil tiranía  
defender nuestro honor es deber.

...

Socialismo viril y consciente  
que hace al hombre vivir como hombre  
su justicia los siglos asombra  
defender nuestro honor es deber.

...

### Mujer Bayamesa

*Sindo Garay*

Lleva en su alma la bayamesa  
tristes recuerdos de tradiciones  
cuando contempla sus verdes llanos  
lágrimas vierte por sus pasiones.

...

pero si siente de la Patria el grito,  
todo lo deja, todo lo quema,  
ese es su lema, su religión.

### Contigo en la Distancia

*César Portillo de la Luz*

No existe un momento de día  
en que pueda olvidarme de ti;  
el mundo parece distinto  
cuando no estás junto a mí.

...

Es que te has convertido  
en parte de mi alma,  
ya nada me conforma  
si no estás tú también.

### Redemption

*Rosendo Ruiz*

Capital and work is the theme  
of a thousand fights and agonies  
the evil tyranny will be removed  
to defend our honour is our duty

...

Socialism virile and conscious  
that allows men to live like men  
its justice will surprise the old centuries  
to defend our honour is our duty.

...

### The Woman from Bayamo

*Sindo Garay*

The Bayamesa carries in her soul  
sad memories of her traditions  
when she contemplates her green plains  
tears she sheds for her passions.

...

But if the motherland calls her  
she leaves everything, she burns everything  
that is her principle, that is her religion.

### With You in the Distance

*César Portillo de la Luz*

There is not one moment in the day  
In which I can be away from you  
The world seems different  
If you are not with me

...

It is that you have become  
part of my soul,  
nothing pleases me  
if you are not here

Más allá de tus labios  
del sol y las estrellas,  
contigo en la distancia  
amada mía estoy.

Novia mía  
*José Antonio Méndez*

Novia mía,  
desde el primer y fiel abrazo  
se hundió por siempre en el ocaso  
mi negra y cruel melancolía.

...  
Al abismo,  
no temo ir en desenfreno  
si no me apartas de tu seno  
novia de todo mi egoísmo.

En nosotros  
*Tania Castellanos*

Cuándo te vayas de mí muy quedo  
te seguirá mi canción del alma.  
Tendrás mi eco de amor en tus  
recuerdos,  
por eso en vano te irás,  
me seguirás queriendo.

...

Me Faltabas Tú  
*José Antonio Méndez*

Me faltaba amor  
me faltaba paz  
me faltabas tú.

Quien iba a pensar  
que hoy pudiera amar  
más hondo que ayer.

...

Beyond your lips,  
the sun and the stars  
With you in the distance  
my love I am.

My Bride  
*Jose Antonio Mendez*

My bride,  
since the first and faithful embrace  
My dark and cruel melancholy  
was forever buried.

...  
I am not fearful of going unrestrained  
to the abyss  
if you don't push me away from your  
bosom,  
bride of all my selfishness.

In Us  
*Tania Castellanos*

When you leave me softly  
the song of my soul will follow you  
the echo of my love  
will be in your memories,  
that's why in vain you will go,  
you will continue to love me.

...

I Was Missing You  
*José Antonio Méndez*

I was missing love  
I was missing peace  
I was missing you.

Who was going to think  
that I could love today  
deeper than yesterday.

...