

(Readers unfamiliar with the Cuban press wouldn't know that this group's name is a play on the words of the title of the weekly relationship and sex advice column in *Juventud Rebelde* newspaper, which is called *Sexo Sentido*, or Sexual Good Sense.)

From Walter Lippmann via AfricansForCuba@yahoo.com
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Cuba's Female Vocal Group Sexto Sentido

Omar Vazquez

Ever since they joined voices nine years ago at the Amadeo Roldan Conservatory in Havana, the Cuban female vocal group Sexto Sentido (Sixth Sense) has offered a rather unique repertoire at concert halls on the island and abroad.

The four young women --Eliene Castillo, Melvis Estevez, Arlety Valdes and Yudelkis Lafuente- have worked hard and have a great capacity for vocal modulation, blending and expression, standing today as one of Cuba's most complete ensembles.

What prompted them to become a quartet? Arlety Valdes, the quartet leader explains:

Since we were little we studied together, we were really very close, we shared the same musical tastes, and even before forming Sexto Sentido we had experimented a little bit singing and dancing together at concerts in our conservatory. In my case, I became particularly attracted to vocal arrangements at the age of 12, at that time the conductor of the children's ensemble I belonged to presented me with a CD by Take 6, a US group that captured my interest. We were very restless, and each one of us came with their own contribution. So one would mark some beat knocking on the piano, the other one would write some lyrics, but when we got together to sing, no matter how simple the song was, it just seemed that we had been singing it our whole lives.

Sexto Sentido did not originate as an a cappella quartet, we loved Rhythm and Blues. We sang songs that pretty much fell into that category, many of them I wrote myself, and then we would get background tracks and we would sing it live. But in fact, it is our a cappella work what has made us outstand.

What sources nourish the work of these vocalists?

As children, we were lucky to have a good musical environment provided to us by our parents and relatives of two of our families, who had a long musical tradition. So our exposure ranged from traditional music to the most contemporary. The famous Quartet De Aida, was our best source in terms of Cuban vocal ensembles. In the case of American music, we listened to Stevie Wonder, Ella Fitzgerald, Earth Wind & Fire, Michael Jackson and other groups like TLC and En Vogue, among others. As we made progress in our musical knowledge, we were also exposed to other genres and artists such as Tom Jobin and Gal Costa, from Brazil. Their music is also represented in our repertoire. To sum it up: we feed ourselves from all good music all over the world.

Why Cancionistica?

This is a very rich genre for interpreting, and we were attracted to it by a project with Joaquin Betancourt that resulted in the recording of our CD entitled Mi Feeling. In this CD the audience will have the opportunity to listen to us interpreting songs, boleros, in most of the cases with very contemporary arrangements. This is our way of doing things. Our formula is to do covers, but with our own style, without threatening the essence of the original, and of course, always making a contribution to the arrangement.

Satisfactions and dissatisfactions

We are fortunate. We have had more satisfactions than dissatisfactions, and from the bad things that may occur to us we always gain experience. In general, we cannot feel unhappy. Through our career we have earned the esteem of our audience, and that is very important for any artist. We have been lucky to be able to have worked with important musicians like Jose Miguel Crego (El Greco), who brought us to the stage for the first time and Chucho Valdes, who is like a father to all of us. Cesar Portillo de la Luz, Martha Valdes, who trusted us and gave us their compositions. Joaquin Betancourt was also able to understand us

How was your recent European Tour?

In Bulgaria, Macedonia and Croatia we were really surprised by the warm welcome accorded to us by the audience. For the first time, we performed an hour long acappella concert, and it was a real challenge.