

[Key address by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Republic of Cuba, at the opening ceremony of the 18th Havana International Ballet Festival \[1\]](#)

Date:

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Distinguished personalities and artists;

Esteemed guests:

It is an honor for me to have been invited to open the 18th Havana International Ballet Festival and to say a few words, which will of course be very brief.

Soon the theater lights will follow each movement and step of the performers, marking the beginning of this highly important event, which always attracts an enthusiast and loyal audience, full of passion and appreciation.

In the darkest days of the Batista dictatorship, Alicia, Fernando and other respectable Cubans sustained with dignity and honor the dream, dating back to 1948, of creating --despite the seemingly insurmountable obstacles-- the Alicia Alonso Ballet, that in its most difficult times had the support and encouragement of the youth organized in the Federation of University Students.

The Cuban Revolution, from the very first months of its triumph, put all available resources at the disposal of that dance company, to help it develop, expand and grow. Alicia's excellence, her talent, tenacity and example, have inspired generations of brilliant artists, and made possible the miracle: the existence of the National Ballet of Cuba, with its world-class quality and worldwide prestige; the birth of the Cuban School of Ballet, a synthesis of universality, tradition, Cubaness and a style uniquely its own, recognized and acclaimed around the globe; the training of new and extraordinary talents; and the possibility of realizing other ambitious dreams.

The first of these festivals, held in 1960, asserted Cuba's cultural vocation, identity and nationality, even under the most adverse circumstances, when major dangers and threats loomed over the country.

Since then, these festivals have drawn the participation of 52 dance companies and over 1000 foreign guests, including dancers, choreographers, instructors, designers, composers, musical directors and critics. Its stages have featured 192 world premieres, making it a true celebration of dance, sustained by the international appeal and prestige of our ballet.

The National Ballet of Cuba has been present in the greatest moments of our major cultural endeavors, throughout the long battle for independence and socialism waged by our people for over 43 years. With its signature style and the excellence of its art, it has become one of the most widely acclaimed companies in the world today. At the same time, other important and prestigious groups representing the most diverse genres of dance have continued to emerge in our country, reflecting the burgeoning expansion of the most varied facets of artistic and intellectual expression. This, combined with the colossal efforts in the field of education, with special emphasis on the quality of education, along with the advances made by our scientific institutions, all support the absolute certainty that Cuba is in the

process of becoming one of the most cultured and educated nations in the world.

The methods, discipline and rigor of the National Ballet School have produced formidable artists.

The recent reconstruction and expansion of the facilities where the National Ballet School is located today, its equipment, and above all, its instructors, have transformed it into an institution of excellence, with three times its former capacity.

When we analyzed these matters in greater depth, we realized that the time had come to strive for new goals. The development of ballet and other artistic areas was uneven across the country. Of the 14 provinces, seven did not have a single National Ballet School graduate. Today, because of the greater capacity created, the school now has students from every province; as in all of our art schools, enrollment there is based on a rigorous selection process.

This past summer, 318 Havana children from the National Ballet workshops traveled to Santiago de Cuba, accompanied by parents, instructors and professional dancers, to present, at the Heredia Theater, a magnificent performance, called El Camarón Encantado. There were three shows given in all, and every one attracted a full house, a total of 7710 people in all, most of them children from all of the province's municipalities. It was the first time that many of them had seen a ballet, and many had never been in a theater before.

The students from Havana, for their part, learned a great deal about our history in Santiago de Cuba, and they also attended artistic performances presented by the children of that province.

Initiatives like these show surprising results.

The idea of extending the vocational workshops founded by the National Ballet of Cuba is also taking shape, and soon an experimental program will be initiated in the capital. It will continue to expand slowly but steadily, and someday in the not-too-distant future, it will spread to the rest of the country.

In the next few months, the National Ballet School will initiate a Special Vocational Workshop, whose classrooms and practice halls will receive 4050 children and adolescents between the ages of seven and 14, from all of the municipalities of Havana. Here is a piece of data that demonstrates the growing interest and cultural level of our people: the announcement of the program at the city's elementary and secondary schools has attracted 41,488 applicants so far. Those who do not qualify can opt still for registering in municipal dance appreciation workshops, which are currently being organized.

Many have put forward that classical ballet is a basic mode of expression related to all other dance forms. As a result, ballet training and techniques can help the development of all the other dance genres. This concept does not rule out other forms of training, of course.

Without culture, freedom is not possible. The accuracy of this claim is what inspires our efforts today. And for us, culture is not limited to artistic pursuits, but rather, it encompasses a concept of comprehensive general culture that includes professional training and basic knowledge of a wide range of disciplines in the sciences, arts and humanities.

While the rest of the world is listening to the drums of war, and resources are squandered on manufacturing ever more sophisticated and destructive weapons, in Cuba we are revolutionizing education to expand the knowledge of new generations, universalizing access to centers of higher learning, taking art schools to every corner of the country, and setting the stage for the enjoyment and pleasure of artistic creation to reach everyone.

I shall conclude these words by expressing my hopes that this Festival may contribute to these efforts; my deepest gratitude goes to those who have made it possible.

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May conscience, culture and art lead our species to a better future!

Thank you, very much.

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