



The Buena Vista phenomenon appears to be slowly fading away, but Cuba is still there, continuously generating and exporting great music to the world. And, still there, too, are producers and filmmakers that travel to that island to see what this is all about. The vibrant and aptly called “Cuba – Island of Music” is another passionate attempt to explain the immense musical treasure that Cuba represents.

Right at the beginning of the documentary, we meet Gary Keys -- its director --, in New York City, where he speaks about the origins of the film. He indicates that he was going to teach a class in Cuba. Once there, he realizes that everybody is playing music, and tries to understand the reason for that. For this purpose, he interviews some of the players – some music legends – in New York City and Cuba, such as composer Chico O’Farrill (before his death), jazz pianist Billy Taylor, and percussionist Candido Camero. We enjoy O’Farrill

with his band playing at New York’s Birdland, and Camero and Taylor doing the same at a different venue.

The movie moves back and forth between Cuba and New York, and Keys captures music in almost every corner of the island. We witness, for example, -- and sometimes under a lot of rain -- street rumbas, a festival on the Chinese presence in Cuba, Afro-Cuban religious chants and rituals, a trip to Cuba’s Instituto Superior de Arte and Universidad de las Artes, and more. And, of course, there is the music, and Keys got a lot of that. We enjoy partial performances by renowned Orquesta Aragón, Grupo Cohiba, Jóvenes Clásicos del Son, Manolín (el Médico de la Salsa), a new version of the legendary Los Zafros, and others. Keys also takes us to some of the island’s famous night clubs, such as La Cecilia, Palacio de la Salsa, Dos Gardenias, and La Zorra y el Cuervo. And then, there are the beaches and lots of girls.

“Cuba – Island of Music” is truly a labor of love, from somebody that really loves music, and Gary Keys rightfully concludes by saying, “I am not going to allow my joy of life to be ruled because you are trying to oppress us.” And that’s the way it should be, carajo. (USA, 2004, color, 72 min). Reviewed on October 12, 2011. **MVD Visual / Wienerworld**

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