



**“Cuba: Half a Century Developing Broad  
and Comprehensive Culture.”**

**Cuban culture is a blend reflecting the synthesis of the contributions of Hispanic, African and other peoples of the world, to forge an identity that has become singularly unique in the course of half a millennium, and which is recognized in the essence of a spirituality that exalts the values of solidarity and conscience, and which is characterized by being both unique and diverse, and by making its insular situation a point of departure towards genuine universality.**

**Throughout history, poets, storytellers, artists and creators have contributed with their works to strengthen the idea of a national culture, which began to emerge from a perspective of democratic and popular liberation. Unlike other social constructs, the wall between people and culture began to break down and consolidate into a concept of social justice and a thirst for beauty, forming an indestructible unit.**

Music is one of the most influential expressions of Cuban culture. It springs from the fusion of the Spanish guitar and the African drum, and gave birth to such distinctive forms as *rumba* and *son*.



Other folk rhythms like *punto*, *zapateo* and *guajira* have more influence on European music. World famous styles like the *bolero*, the *Habanera*, the *Guaracha*, *Mambo*, *Danzón* and the *Cha cha chá* are genuinely Cuban.

The classical ballet, directed by Alicia Alonso, internationally renowned for its high artistic quality, presents national and international festivals in the *Gran Teatro de la Habana* (Grand Havana Opera House).

**Since the nineteenth century literature has been just as important in Cuban culture, in particular romantic poets like Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and José María Heredia (1803-1839). A faithful exponent of poetry of their age was our national hero José Martí, (1853-1895) poet and storyteller, the forerunner of Modernism.**



**In the twentieth century, fiction achieved great splendour. There are many contemporary novelists and narrators among which we must name Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980), José Lezama Lima (1910-1976) as icons of the literary trends of their time and Nicolas Guillén, (1902-1989) the national poet of Cuba.**

**With the triumph of the revolution in 1959, culture entered a new phase of development.**

**One of the most transcendental events of this phase was the 1961 Literacy Campaign, which was a huge step forward for the democratization of culture, as it allowed for the eradication of the illiteracy which had previously affected 58% of the Cuban population. The establishment of free education eliminated inequalities in the access to educational resources and opportunities.**

**The promotion of national and international literary contests by the National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC), Casa de las Américas, the Saíz Brothers Association, editors and other cultural institutions stimulates creativity among the Cuban people. The yearly International Book Festival is an event that is gathering strength all the time because of its dissemination and promotion of the literature of Cuba and other participating nations.**

**The National Library of Havana houses the literary works of both Cuban and foreign writers. It is the biggest in Cuba, but the fourteen provincial and municipal capitals also have their own libraries. In the mountains there are mobile library services which serve the smaller centres.**

**Visual arts also figure among the manifestations of Cuban culture. For the last 30 years we have shown a great capacity to absorb the most significant international art influences into our own creative sensibilities, at the same time having a critical stance in the themes in order to continue defining features of Cuban identity in the works of artists like Roberto Fabelo, Zaida del Río, Tomás Sánchez, Manuel Mendive and Nelson Domínguez, the most influential of recent decades.**

**A merely folkloric vision has been left behind as insufficient for attaining a wider focus of popular culture. We have to take into account the conditions of industrial production, movement and consumption under which culture is organized, in a world in which neoliberal globalization tries to impose the hegemony of a superpower, the monopoly of information and communications through consumptive, banal and mediocre messages to large segments of the population of the planet.**

**Culture, seen as one of the ways in which development can be expressed, demands a position that along with economic, ecological and social planes is one of the indicators of the level of development that each society on our planet reaches.**

**In the Cuban social model, culture becomes an irreplaceable instrument for the transmission of ethical values favouring human growth. The fundamental principles of the Cuban cultural policy, renewed in its programmes, are enacted through the cultural institutions and the organizations that bring together the artists and writers (the Cuban Union of Writers and Artists, and the Saíz Brothers Association), and in the combined work carried out by other bodies and organizations.**

**Cuba is trying to develop a culture based on a universal conscience, capable of recognizing that all people have the same rights to take part as creators and participants in the cultural heritage of the nation.**

**For that to happen, it is essential to cultivate and respect national cultural values from a deeply humanist ethic, to resist that influence and succeed in letting the human being be a protagonist and a critical participant, who can establish a true and creative dialogue with contemporary culture, and stand up to all types of manipulation.**

## **Basic principles, strategies and priorities of Cuban cultural policy.**

- **Preservation of the universal and profoundly Latin American and Caribbean character of the national culture.**
- **Conservation and transmission of cultural heritage**
- **Recognition of cultural diversity**
- **Promotion and encouragement of artistic and literary creativity**
- **Respect and support for the agency and creativity of communities in conducting their own socio-cultural processes**
- **Recognition of the role of culture in the drive and direction of socioeconomic processes**

**The National Cultural Programme is implemented throughout the country, putting in place projects of development that link the cultural institutions and creative people with the wider population so as to maintain, organize, broaden and perfect cultural opportunities, dialogue and mutual support.**

**Setting up the programmes has not been easy. It has been carried out in material conditions that are very difficult and sometimes critical, and has required huge efforts from all involved at local and national levels.**

**In spite of the tangible developments that have been observed in recent years, the results are still limited, and neither has the use of resources been optimum. The technical and material conditions for promoting art and literature have been complex, as has been the creative effort expended in trying to raise the quality of life of the people.**

**The difficulties that have been confronted and overcome, and those that persist, show us the way, as they are recognized and felt by all those involved in the wider cultural project.**

## **The priorities of the Cuban cultural policy are:**

**To undertake actions that will rescue, preserve and protect Cuban cultural heritage to defend the values of the national identity**

**To deepen the links between institutions and creative people**

**To diversify the Programme and promote it nationally and internationally**

**To integrate common strategies into various organizations and social sectors with particular emphasis on the relationship between the educational sector and the media**

**To give priority to the training, ethical and aesthetic development of children, adolescents and young people**

**To strengthen the institutional cultural systems particularly at municipal level**

**To develop the human resources involved in artistic and cultural activity, and continue the process of decentralization and widening of enrolment in Arts education, aiming for the highest quality and effective application of special programmes.**

**To apply new technologies and information technology support to cultural processes**

**To consolidate and expand the economic, financial, technological, industrial and corporate infrastructure of cultural affairs.**

## **Activities**

**The activities established in various cultural manifestations during the final decade of the last century showed a strong contraction, and later the beginning of a gradual recovery in recent years, corresponding to the general situation of the nation.**

**These years have revealed the knowledge, skills and capabilities that our workers, artists, writers and people in general possess for increasing their levels of participation in taking necessary decisions in matters of culture and human development.**

**It has to be pointed out that, during some very difficult times for our country, investment has been made in restoring, remodelling and expanding many cultural institutions. It was very costly, but important for Cuban culture.**

**The National Museum of Fine Arts, re-opened in July 2001, has substantially improved the quality of exhibitions.**

**The completion of the Cubanacán National School of Art is another significant cultural achievement. The National Ballet and Visual Arts schools have been upgraded.**

**Fifteen new schools for art instructors have been built and 52 centres of Arts education have been renovated. These efforts are designed to raise the artistic quality of the country.**

## **Conclusions**

**During the last half century, in the face of the multiple vicissitudes of a country in the process of development and with few resources, Cuban culture has expanded into a broad and comprehensive culture in which the whole of society can participate in the various modes of artistic expression.**

**In the current environment in which cultural projects are carried out, we must bear in mind that the economic restructuring that takes place, along with tangible and progressive national economic growth, creates new ways of distributing these gains to the people through the consequent social restructuring. The internal reality also requires constant clarifications of cultural policy which express its continuity and the new paths to be taken.**

**Without a doubt this requires a tremendous effort in harnessing the national talent.**

**The goal of Cuban culture is to make our people one of the most cultured in the world in the coming years, as a revolutionary and humanistic alternative in the face of the spiritual poverty, globalized skepticism and banality that is sustained and spread by the most powerful technology.**

**This requires the efforts of the whole nation: our institutions, artists, intellectuals, promoters, teachers, researchers, academics and specialists.**



