

By Mara Glebovs, CCFA Toronto



Gerardo Alfonso evoked a standing ovation for his performance at the March 22 Toronto concert of the III World Solidarity with Cuba Conference Tour. The audience of almost 100 rose to their feet applauding until Gerardo returned to the stage and treated everyone to a few more numbers. The Sanctuary of the College Street United Church provided a spiritual setting for Gerardo's heartfelt songs of love, humanity, life, and politics. One of the songs, "Yo soy Mambi," affirmed the Afro-Cuban contribution to Cuban culture and society. In Cuba, the word "Mambi" refers to the patriotic soldiers who defeated Spain through two of Cuba's wars of Independence from 1868 to 1876 and again from 1895 to 1898. It is estimated that the participation of Cubans of African descent in the Mambi Army was as high as 92%. Another song was dedicated to a friend who Gerardo had always wanted to be like, but who died very young. His well-known love song to the city of Havana, "Sabanas Blancas" delighted the audience, many of whom sang along (in this newsletter, the words appear in Spanish and in English).

In the role of MC, Julio Fonseca, Asociación de Cubanos Juan Gualberto Gómez, introduced speakers and explained the meaning of many of Gerardo's songs. Javier Dómokos Ruiz, Consul General of Cuba, thanked everyone for coming out on a "chilly spring evening." Sandra Ramírez Rodríguez, Director of the ICAP Canada Desk, thanked all Canadians for helping to make the tour possible. She said that 2014 was a very special year for Cuba because in Washington D.C., from June 4 to 11, there would be action to try to win the release of the three Cuban heroes who remain in prison.

The year 2014 is also very important because Havana is expecting up to 4,000 guests at the III World Solidarity with Cuba Conference in October. Sandra said that more than 90,000 foreigners, who had studied in Cuba and were now working in medicine, engineering, and other professions in other countries, would have the opportunity to go to Cuba to see how Cuba is striving to improve its society. Conference sessions and workshops will include topics such as, "Update of Social and Economic Model of the Cuban Revolution", "Foreign Policy of Cuban Revolution and Latin-American and Caribbean Integration", "Socio-political Tourism in Cuba", and "Social Networks and Alternative Media". The conference will also include cultural and social events such as, a Cuban Night with Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR), a Tribute to Camilo Cienfuegos with a march from Revolution Square to the Malecón, and a meeting with members of parliament at the House of Friendship.

In the audience were some special guests: Cuban Consuls Teresa Daisy Díaz Albuerne and Francisca Rivero Rodríguez; Consul General of Venezuela Martha Elena Prado de Marquez; Leader of the Communist Party of Canada Miguel Figueroa; author and performer Brian Gordon Sinclair; Professors Keith and Zilpha Ellis; and local jazz musician Wally Booker. The CCFA Toronto and the CNC thank them for attending the concert. Thank you also to Minister Chris Levan for his generosity in allowing us to use the Sanctuary to hold the event. Unfortunately, Chris was ill and could not join us.

Thank you to the CNC, ICAP, the CCFA Toronto, and all of the volunteers, too numerous to name, for making this concert and the cross-Canada tour possible.