

## When I came back to Cuba

A translation of <https://campanitasdefe.com/2017/11/04/cuando-volvi-a-cuba/>

***Summary.** This little bell tells the story of my second trip to **Cuba**, when I returned to the island to share a talk at a conference about the implications of **complexity theory**. Here it is recounted how I met the extraordinary pianist and musician **José María Vitier** and the great scientist **José de la Luz Montero**. The song "**Por la Bandera**" (**For the flag**), which advocates unity for **Cubans** and, by extension, to all of us, can be heard in Spanish [here](#), beautifully arranged by **Lázaro Alemán** and performed by **Justo Emilio Rueda**.*

*The song can also be heard and visualized in Spanish in a YouTube video by the end of the text.*

*The blog [Presentation](#) provides information about the purpose of these little bells and the blog [Organization](#) shows how the entries are grouped by categories. This entry belongs to the categories "**Jesus the equilibrium, the hypotenuse and  $Y = X$** ," "**Calls to conversion**" and "**Cuban little bells**."*

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Years passed since in 1995 I went to **Havana** for a single day, during my honeymoon in **Cancún** as per [the first little bell](#), and the world changed decisively in 2001 with the fall of the **Twin Towers** in **New York**. By then, I was attempting to give lectures "**from science to peace**" in **Colombia**, but once the infamous **September 11** happened, I understood that I had to share wherever I could and in two languages.

At that time, I learned that a conference on the implications of **complexity theory** would be held in **Havana** in January 2002, and of course, I submitted a paper, thinking that I might also meet **Silvio Rodríguez** again. I had sent him, with not a little difficulty, a copy of my book "[The Fig Tree & The Bell](#)," completed in Spanish but not edited, and I didn't know if he had received it.

The day after returning to **Cuba**, **Machi**, the same guide from my first trip six years earlier, picked me up to take me to various places. First, and very early, we went to **Estudios Ojalá**, where unfortunately, **Silvio** was not present, as he was visiting some other place in the island. There, they showed me in a little room the manuscript I had sent him, and his secretaries were pleased to meet the persistent writer attempting to communicate with the singer-songwriter. They told me they would notify me if a meeting were possible, but such didn't happen as he didn't return in time.

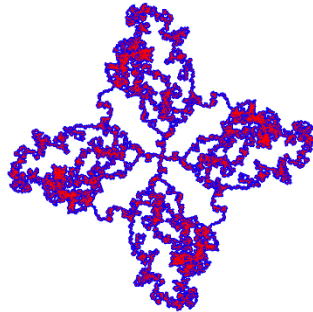
After visiting the "*God willing*" studios, such is the meaning of *Ojalá*, we headed to the city center and towards the **Ministry of Culture** to try to get the phone numbers of some musicians I thought I might collaborate with. A lady sitting at a tiny desk near the main door gave me the requested information in a rather natural way. She pulled a much-used notebook from a side drawer and, without any official formalities, read me the handwritten numbers I asked for. I left amazed and happy towards my hotel to try to establish communications before the conference began.

The numbers I was given were either out of service or nobody answer them, except one—that of the great pianist and composer **José María Vitier**. I dialed his number and soon after had a pleasant conversation with a lady. We talked about music, and I confessed to her that **José María's** arrangement of *La llama de amor viva* (*The alive flame of love*), a famous poem by **Saint John of the Cross**, was one of the most beautiful songs I had ever heard. She was delighted that I, as a foreigner, appreciated the artist's beautiful music, and towards the end, I guessed who she was. "*Are you Silvia?*" I asked, and she confirmed. She was **José María's** wife, to whom he often dedicates his work with heartfelt expressions of love.

After she spoke with her husband, and contrary to the logical prediction of my brother **Germán Vives**, who thought such a meeting wouldn't happen, we set a date for an encounter. They came to my hotel on a Saturday, and we talked non-stop for five hours. It was truly beautiful! We shared our lives, bonding over our common faith, and I learned, for example, that the stunning "**Cuban Mass to the Virgin of Charity of Copper**" (as *She* is known in **Cuba**), which **Pope John Paul II** heard in **Havana** in 1998, was an offering to *The Rose* for the healing of their son **José Adrián**, who was entrusted to *Her* as a last resort when, as a child, he was on his deathbed. **José María**, on the piano, composed the universally resonant and distinctly **Cuban** music of the **Mass**, including sections in *Latin*, and **Silvia** wrote beautiful *Spanish* lyrics, performed by **Silvio Rodríguez** and **Amaury Pérez**.



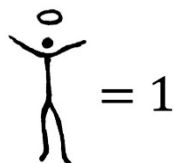
We became good friends and have remained so to this day. To my friends at the time, curious about my return to **Cuba**, I reported: "*Well, I couldn't see Silvio, but I met Silvia!*" For it happens, incidentally, that her last name is also **Rodríguez** ...



... The conference was very successful, and in my presentation I explained why the hypotenuse is the path to peace, as can be understood here, here and also here. There, in the **plain** of the famous son, that is, in **Havana**, subtly mentioned in **Son de la Loma** (an emblematic **Cuban** composition stating a rhythm from the knoll), and while lifting a very heavy microphone from a desk, I sang a cappella one of my songs, which curiously appeared in the event's proceedings as if it had been written by **Silvio Rodríguez** — an honor for me!

I must add that besides the **Vitiers**, I also met during that trip the great Cuban scientist **José de la Luz Montero**, who, although educated in chemistry, knows more physics and mathematics than many people. He collaborated for years with another notable figure, **Jesús Novoa**, and, against all odds, they made significant progress due to their admirable tenacity and despite the island's limitations.

When we met, just minutes after my presentation, he asked me, surely to test me, "*for you, which is the most important number of all?*" I answered that it was "**zero**," explaining that such was the case because any one of us raised to such a power achieved **unity**. Since then, and despite the obstacles and systems that hinder communication, we have been close friends. He took the photograph shown above with **Maestro Vitier** during a later visit for another conference on **complexity** two years later. On that occasion, he also introduced me to the great musician **Lázaro Alemán**, who is now the director of my **Shanti Setú/Puente de Paz** project ...



... Returning to **José María** and **Silvia**, one of the songs I gave them joyfully during our long and fraternal meeting was one titled "**Por la Bandera**," *For the flag*, one inspired by the famous story of the boy **Elián González**, who in 1999 survived what his mother did not: the journey from **Cuba** to the **United States** across the high seas on a raft. As is well known, the arrival of the "**little rafter**" sparked a camp battle between **Cubans** from here and from there, a shameful spectacle that lasted several months of **hatred**. The harangues were filled with various aired insults—even with **Rosaries** in hand—and the story ended violently with the child's handover to his father, who returned him to **Cuba**. Those turbulent times caused many wounds, and that incident further increased disunity.

Reflecting on what was happening, one day, I appropriated the most famous **Cuban** song of all, "**Guantanamera**," *A lady from Guantanamo*, and with due respect to an entire people whose music I have admired and enjoyed since childhood — surely from my mother's womb — I used a lively version by the famous band **Irakere**, modifying the chorus and Martian verses to turn the song into a call for **unity** and **peace** among **Cubans** and, by extension, to all of us.

Knowing well that it is true that we must "**raise the residence of bread and truth**," I used an allusion to the beautiful hymn "**Vamos a andar**" (*Let's go on*) by **Silvio Rodríguez** in the chorus and asked my brother **Fernando Duarte**, "**duartecito**," who created the beautiful covers of my books and various drawings adorning my books and this blog, to make an icon alluding to the flag uniting the two coasts.

The original version of the song was gifted to various **Cuban** artists over the years. I gave it, for instance, to **Pablo Milanés** at the end of a concert in **San Francisco**, telling him it was a **Colombian's** dream for the **Cubans**. I also personally gave it to **Silvio Rodríguez** when we met a couple of years after this trip, and to **Chucho Valdés**, **Eliades Ochoa**, **Giraldo Piloto**, **Maraca Valle** and **Juan de Marcos González**, among others who came to perform here at the **University of California, Davis**, or in the **San Francisco** area.

**Maestro Vitier** immediately warned me to be careful with what I did using the famous melody, emphasizing with all seriousness, "**don't mess up with Guantanamera**." I told him that perhaps someone could arrange my version so it didn't sound the same, but he persisted in his warning.

Below is the final version refined over time, no longer as **Guantanamera**, but arranged by **Lázaro Alemán López** into another eminently **Cuban** song with the rhythm of "son

montuno." This joyful and vital version was beautifully performed by **Justo Emilio Rueda Bravo** (with a hat), who added a peculiar **Cuban** flair, rolling the r's to embellish it.



The original verses came to me 22 years ago, and it has been worth the wait, as you'll see when you hear it! Hopefully, **Ojalá**, this song will promote **peace** here and there, so that we give each other **white roses** to heal the world.

**God willed it, and now resounds Shanti Setú/Puente de Paz! What a good song is the first one of my crop to dance! "God is really great!"** my grandmother **Fanny** would exclaim.

**Let's mambo! Let's enjoy!**

## **FOR THE FLAG**

*"I cultivate a white rose"*  
**José Martí, 1891**



*Hey, call him...*

*It is my flag, your flag, our flag...*

**For the flag  
united inside and out,  
with the flag  
let's go on without grief.**

**For the flag  
united inside and out,  
with the flag  
let's go on in earnest.**

The enigma gets fixed  
when we all comprehend,  
the enigma gets fixed  
when we all comprehend,  
that we ought to forgive one another  
due to a *Rose* we are brothers.

**For the flag  
united inside and out,  
with the flag  
let's go on without grief.**

**For the flag  
united inside and out,  
with the flag  
let's go on in earnest.**

The matter is not to blame  
the other for one's problem,  
the matter is not to blame  
the other for one's problem,  
today we ought to terminate  
rancor and complaint.

**For the flag  
united inside and out,  
with the flag  
let's go on without grief.**

The dilemma is not external  
nor turns out to be a system,  
the challenge is to become an example  
exchanging into love all sorrow.

**For the flag  
united inside and out,  
with the flag  
let's go on in earnest.**

*Hey, call him...*

*The ones here, the ones there, we are the same thing...*

*United like brothers...*

*Shanti Setú to dream, Puente de Paz...*

**United for the flag,  
I go out in humility  
united inside and out,  
I carry a white Rose  
united for the flag,  
and I sing with clarity  
united inside and out.**

**Inside and out  
let's go in earnest. (2)**

I carry a frank idea  
for those here and there,  
planting due balance,  
and growing friendship,

healing without revenge,  
not leaving anyone out,  
without selfishness nor any other stain,  
forgive and you shall see,  
follow the white *Rose*,  
rectifying in truth,  
and with **Martí** and unity  
with the flag.

*Puente de Paz...*



*(March 2000/November 2017)*



The song may be heard and visualized in Spanish [here](#).