

## El Maestro Alfonso Fuentes

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### El Maestro Alfonso Fuentes

#### Talks about His March Concert



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Free Bronx Piano Sundays

Alfonso Fuentes Concert

Sunday, March 9

3 pm

Pregones Theater, 575 Walton Ave., Bronx

By Alberto Hernández-Banuchi

Composer, poet, performer and educator Alfonso Fuentes will perform his first piano solo recital based exclusively on musical improvisations and on the themes and rhythms of Puerto Rican and Caribbean folklore at a free Bronx concert March 9. This will be piano with sabor.

As part of el maestro's improvisations, his audience can expect a real music treat. As each theme is presented, Fuentes will embellish and mold the rhythms and melodies, creating a unique sound right on the spot.

Fuentes is inaugurating the Bronx Piano Sundays, a free series to be presented on Sunday afternoons in

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March, featuring a lineup of accomplished pianists of works of all styles and eras. They will use the theater's magnificent Steinway & Sons grand piano, which was custom selected to fit the theater's unique dimensions and acoustic temperature.

Centro spoke with Fuentes at his home in Puerto Rico about his career and his upcoming concert, which is being presented at Pregones Theater in the Bronx by Pregones and the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre.

Nominated for a Latin Grammy in 2009 for Best Classical Work of the Year, Fuentes has created new works for orchestra, ensemble and solo performances and has performed in more than 300 concert tours throughout the world. He has a flair for marrying Caribbean rhythms and classical instruments. As a pianist, his performances include more than 3,500 concert appearances. He has collaborated with artists such as the great Plácido Domingo.

Q: Have you performed in New York before?

A: Yes, I have been in New York many times as piano accompanist and music arranger for pop musicians Nydia Caro, Los Hispanos, Lucecita Benitez, Yolandita Monge, in Carnegie Hall, Town Hall, the old Teatro Puerto Rico and Hostos Community College. That was long ago. In the recent past years I have been involved in other kinds of projects. I performed at Manhattan School of Music, Teatro Museo del Barrio and Symphony Space. But this is the first time I will present a solo piano recital and perform my own music and improvisations. I am honored to be a guest artist in Teatro Pregones' Bronx Piano Sundays.

Q: What is the reaction of the public when you present your compositions?

A: Every time that I have visited New York to present my music creations, I have returned to Puerto Rico very pleased. I have felt the interest and respect for my music. Even though its harmony and structure are complex, I have learned a lot from other musicians and from the vital Nuyorican culture.

I am, I think, one of the few Puerto Ricans that does not have family or a distant relative living in this city. I never ever lived there, but it is something I would like to do in the future, perhaps a one-year stay in the Big Apple.

I live in the mountains of Trujillo Alto, facing a panoramic countryside view, where each night I am surrounded by the chants of the coquies and other nocturnal fauna of my homeland and by the sound of the rain hitting the trees and flowers of my garden. It is from these nocturnal sounds that I got the inspiration for the symphony Planeaciones Ancestrales that requires more than 50 percussion instruments.

On a recent visit to China, I was in shock when a professor and composer of the Sichuan Conservatory in

Chengdu, after a performance of my symphony, identified various musical scales native to the tribal White Horse people of Tibet and that was in my own piece! It was captivating to listen to her as she pointed out the similarities among the scales, melodies and artistic expressions from such culturally distant countries.

Q: Would you share some of your upcoming concerts or musical events?

A: After a visit to China in 2012 as an artist-in-residence in Sichuan with a group of colleague musicians, I've been planning to invite various music professors to come to the Conservatory of Music in Puerto Rico, where I teach orchestration and musical composition. We will be celebrating the First China-Puerto Rico Cultural and Music Exchange on March 5. I am excited about this project, which will definitively create a musical and fraternal bridge between Puerto Rico and China.

Q: What about the Pregones program?

A: To be honest, this is a new venture and experience for me because the concert will solely consist of piano improvisations. These will be based on themes from other composers and also from my own inspiration right at that moment. The outcome is uncertain. It is a risk I must take and live with, but the spontaneous musical rhythms and melodies will definitely be unique and different from previous concerts. Of course, these will be based on diverse Puerto Rican musical forms such as seis, bomba and plena as well as rumba and other international musical elements.

My wish is that the New York public will take home some pleasant memories after listening to my spontaneous music making. This concert will emerge from a sincere sense of honesty and humility. It is unpretentious. I am not seeking any kind of recognition, but solely the experience.

I hope the Sunday afternoon audience will be pleased to recognize musical traits of the sunny Caribbean. In a sense, I want to bring to my Bronx audience a living piece of our common musical national heritage.

While the concert is free, space is limited. Reservations are required at (718) 585-1202.

For more information visit <http://www.pregones.org> [3].

Interview by Alberto Hernández-Banuchi, Centro's Chief Librarian and Archivist

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Published on Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños (<http://centroweb.hunter.cuny.edu>)

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