



# An Irish Tune-Up for Cuba

Sheila Langan | @SheiLangan | November 29,2010 | 10:46 AM



*National Piano Workshop, Havana, Cuba - From the portfolio Una Corda - The Soft Pedal.*

Since 2006, many visitors traveling from Ireland to Cuba have carried slightly heavier than usual suitcases. In addition to their clothes, toiletries and other necessities, they have been carrying piano parts and tools for tuning and repair. They have transported a total of more than 500 pounds, to date, all of which has been given to Havana's National Workshop for Musical Instrument Repair.

This courier program is run by Una Corda, an Irish non-profit organization, and is recognized by the Centre of Coordination for International Collaboration of the Cuban Ministry of Culture. Una Corda, which takes its name from the piano's soft pedal, is dedicated to reinvigorating the National Workshop – to giving Cubans the tools and skills to repair the many pianos that have started to deteriorate due to Cuba's isolation and its hot, humid climate. In addition to the courier program, the organization sends Irish musicians and piano tuners over to Cuba with the aim of not only helping to repair pianos in the workshop, but also of teaching people how to make repairs themselves and pass on the knowledge.

When David Creedon went to Cuba in 2008, he carried his own luggage, some glue and sandpaper from Una Corda, and an additional item: a Canon 1ds Mark III camera. The Cork photographer has exhibited internationally and received much critical acclaim for his last show, *Ghosts of the Faithful Departed*: haunting, evocative shots of the interiors of abandoned houses in Ireland. It first exhibited in Chicago, with the help of Sarah McCarthy, a Chicago woman who was fascinated by Creedon's work, and was one of the largest touring shows in Europe in 2008.

Creedon first heard about Una Corda when he caught the tail end of a 3:00 a.m. radio program in his car. At the time, he was working on a series of images of 57 Steinway pianos purchased by the Irish government, so the snippet about the project in Cuba naturally piqued Creedon's interest. He then got in touch with Ciaran Ryan, the program's founder, who encouraged him to make the trip to Cuba. After a long wait for his visa, the photographer was on his way. He fondly recalls his first trip to National Workshop for Musical Instrument Repair, located off the beaten track in Santo Tomás, between Árbol Seco and Subirana in Centro Havana: "Not many tourists venture to this part of town and when I arrived I felt unsure about the location as there seemed to be nobody about, but my driver was insistent that this was the right place. I was uncertain if I should stay in the car or get out when a man peeked out of a doorway and quickly disappeared only to return thirty seconds later waving the Irish Tricolor."

Creedon's latest exhibition, *Una Corda – the Soft Pedal*, features photographs he took during his ten days at the National Workshop. His arresting, large-scale images are on display at the Irish Arts Center in New York until January 9th. The thirteen photographs take viewers inside the workshop for an intimate look at the pianos in the midst of or in need of repair. In one, dusty piano keys sit on a table in a crooked line. In another, an old, ornate piano leg is just visible in a dark corner, surrounded by tools and worktables. In other shots, Creedon moves closer to the pianos, focusing on almost unrecognizable components of the instrument that make for stunning abstract images. By featuring the pianos both wholly and in pieces, his photographs almost mimic the disassembling and reassembling that takes place in the workshop.

Surprisingly, Creedon hadn't initially considered exhibiting the photographs he took in Cuba. But when Joanna Groarke, the program and production manager at the Arts Center, saw the images, she encouraged Creedon to consider collaborating on a show. Anyone who sees *Una Corda* will be very glad she did. Gallery hours are Monday-Friday 10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. Call 212-757-3318 ext. 203 for an appointment. [irishartscenter.org](http://irishartscenter.org).

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