









*Una Corda: a musical direction for the depression of a soft pedal on the plano decade referred to as the "Special Period" and are still living under a lower standard than they were before 1991. This period forced Cuba to change from a nation of consumers, dependent on external oil sources, to a more sustainable economy based on meeting basic needs and

At the National Workshop of Instrument Repair the training programme ceased and the workshop fell steadily into disrepair. With the US trade embargo, piano technicians on the island cannot buy the tools and materials they need, and as the older generation of Cuban tuners retires, the skills that go the back streets of old Havana, and a world apart from the tourist trail, is the National Workshop of Instrument Repair

eration of Cuban tuners retires, the skills that go with the tools are also disappearing

Pianists in Cuba face challenges people in most countries can't imagine. The tropical climate is particularly unforgiving on items made from wood. Now, an Irish group is helping to restore thousands of pianos that have fallen into disrepair.

Since 2006, Irish piano tuners have been going to Havana to help tram local technicians. Under the title "Una Corda - The Irish Cuban Piano Project" and working in conjunction with the Havana Arts.

When the Russians became Cuba's close ally in the 60s and 70s, they used the workshop as a training centre for what is now the current generation of Cuban piano tuners and technicians. Two classes of blind and partially sighted tuners graduated from here – the first in 1970, and another class two years later.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990, the aid programme that they had provided to the country came to an end heralding the start of chronic food and fuel shortages. The collapse decimated the Cuban economy. The country lost approximately 80% of its imports, 80% of its exports and its Gross and working in conjunction with the Havana Arts Authority and the Cuban Ministry of Culture, they 80% of its imports, 80% of its exports and its Gross Domestic Product dropped by 34 percent. Cuba's oil imports dropped to 10% of have now been given the responsibility of restoring and re-equipping the National Workshop there. The organisation has three objectives: sending a small number of piano-tuners to Cuba to tune

Cubans suffered a great deal during the

pianos and train people locally; to help restore Havana's National Workshop of Instrument Repair; and to encourage Irish people travelling to Cuba on holiday to carry piano parts with them, which Una Corda

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Over the last number of years, tourists travelling to Cuba have made a real contribution by becoming one of Una Corda's 'mules'. Volunteers simply carry a package of piano parts or tools with them in their luggage when they go. When I travelled there, I brought pots of glue and sandpaper in my luggage. So far, over three hundred kilos of parts have been carried in luggage all with the approval of the Cuban authorities.

When I arrived, my taxi driver pointed to the building and I looked at him as if to say,

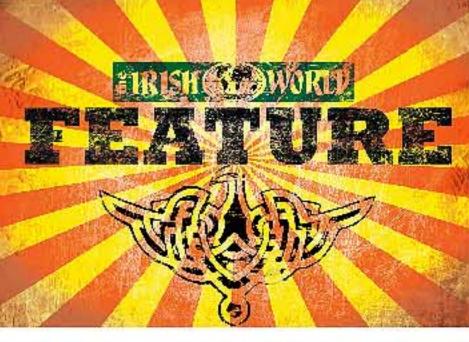
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"Are you sure?" A man came out of the workshop and looked at me, then disappeared - only to return thirty seconds later waving an Irish flag. The workshop was dark and dusty, but incredibly tidy and clean. Several volunteer technicians sat around talking. Even though there was work to be done on the pianos, a shortage of parts and supplies meant they were unable to carry this out.

The pianos that are being repaired and restored by the parts Una Corda is sending to Cuba belong to Havana's music schools. Up to twenty of them are in the workshop at any one time. Word has now gone out across Havana, and there are many more pianos in

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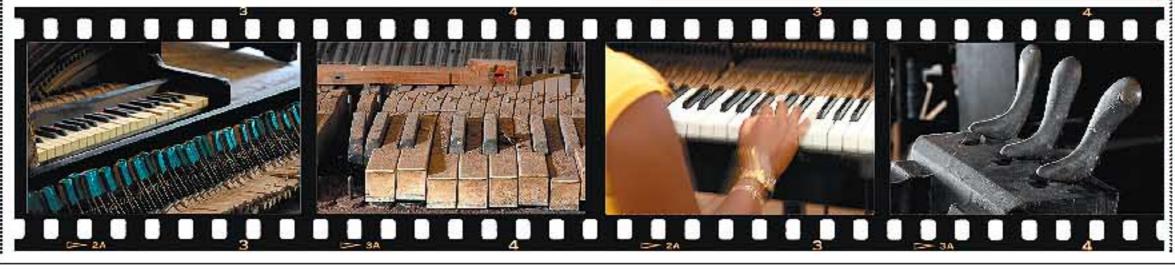
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