

UNA CORDA

The Soft Pedal

Photographs by

David Creedon



Irish Arts Center
553 West 51st Street
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UNA CORDA - The soft pedal

In the back streets of old Havana and a world apart from the tourist trade is the National Workshop of Instrument Repair.

When the Russians became Cuba's close ally in the 1960s 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. However, with the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, this training programme ceased and the workshop fell steadily into disrepair.

Pianists in Cuba face challenges that most people in other countries can't imagine. The island's tropical climate is particularly hard on things made from wood, and the scarcity of

supplies makes repairs virtually impossible.

Now an Irish group is helping to restore thousands of pianos that have fallen into disrepair. Una Corda is a charitable non-profit organisation run by volunteers from Ireland's music community. Since 2006, Irish piano tuners have been going to Havana to tune and help train local technicians.

Working in conjunction with the Havana Arts Authority and the Cuban Ministry of Culture, the organization has three objectives: sending a small number of piano-tuners to Cuba to tune pianos and train people locally; helping to restore Havana's National Workshop of Instrument Repair; and encouraging Irish people travelling to Cuba on holidays to carry piano parts with them, which Una Corda supplies.





Over the last number of years tourists travelling to Cuba have made a real contribution to the project by becoming Una Corda's couriers. Volunteers simply carry a package of piano parts or tools with them in their luggage when they go. So far, over three hundred kilos of parts have been carried in luggage, all with the approval of the Cuban authorities.

The pianos that are being repaired and restored with the parts Una Corda supplies belong to Havana's music schools. Up to twenty are in the workshop at any one time. Word has gone out across Havana and there are many more pianos in the queue in need of restoration. Over time the workshop itself is to be restored with money raised in Ireland.



David Creedon was born in Cork, Ireland. His work is regularly published and has featured in a range of European, American and Australian magazines. The *Irish Independent* has called him “Cork’s Vermeer” while the *Irish Times* has described his photographs as “meticulously made”.

He has exhibited at galleries throughout Ireland, and internationally in London, Chicago, Sarajevo, Bucharest, Sofia, Nicosia, Belfast, Thessaloniki, Tbilisi and Yerevan.

David’s work has been described as “one of the most significant collections of photography in contemporary Ireland”. Another critic has written: “His photographs transcend the documentary form and enter the realm of art, they are poems in photographs”.

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For more information on the Irish Cuba piano project visit www.unacorda.org

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