

This article by Alfredo Ortiz was first published in the April 2017 issue of the Sylvia Woods Harp Center e-Newsletter

You can find Alfredo's PDFs at www.harpcenter.com/Alfredo



**¡Mira amor! ¡Otro video de mis composiciones!
(Look my love! Another video of my compositions!).**

Every few weeks I check Youtube.com with the words "harp Ortiz" and I always find one or more new videos of my compositions. Some are of large harp ensembles performing at UNESCO in Paris or harp ensembles in Italy or Indonesia while others are of little children, students and professional lever, pedal and folk harpists. Some feature ballet dancers, belly dancers or combinations of harp and a wide variety of instruments. If you search Youtube.com for "Habanera Gris," about 100 videos come up; "Danza de Luzma" no less than 30, and many for the exciting and FUN "Merengue Rojo" or the dramatic "Milonga Para Amar" and more.

I was born in Cuba in 1946, and moved to Venezuela in 1958. My harp journey started on a borrowed harp, just after turning 15, under very difficult economic circumstances of my family. It was the last day of classes at high school in December 1961. On stage kids sang, recited poems, and more. And, as it often happened, someone played the "arpa criolla" (traditional Venezuelan harp from the plains of that country and center instrument of Venezuela's national dance: the "joropo."). I recognized the player as one of my friends from playground time, Fernando Guerrero. After the event I told him I had been in love with that instrument since the first time I heard it on the radio, the very first day I arrived from Cuba by ship in 1958. Every day on television harpists would play beautiful instrumental pieces or accompanied singers in the traditional music styles from the plains. Fernando said: "Sure, I will teach you what I know but you need a harp."



As soon as I arrived home that day, I asked my parents for a harp. But my mother brought me back to reality when she asked me if I remembered what happened to my piggy bank the week before . . . I had broken it to give my coins to my mother to buy milk for my little sister Rosy, who was only a little over one year old. We were living in a rented two-bedroom-one-bath apartment: my parents, my sisters Diana and Rosy, and about 10 Cuban refugees sleeping on the floor of the living room. I was being the typical self-centered teenager thinking of just me when I asked for the harp. I felt terribly sad and apologized for asking. But one of the refugees had a Venezuelan friend visiting and he overheard the conversations and said: "I have a harp at home just for

decoration. I will be happy to let him borrow my harp." A few days later I walked about one mile with the lightweight harp to Fernando's home for the first of many lessons "by ear."

Having seen many Venezuelan harpists on TV I had also seen harpists from Chile and Paraguay in popular music shows on television. We had a very simple record player at home and almost all of the very few records we had were of harp music. I was mesmerized by the famous "Pájaro Campana," music symbol of the Paraguayan harp and was trying to learn it on my own but was failing miserably. Then they announced a free performance of a folk group from Paraguay at an amusement park near my home. I went, talked to the harpist who gave the name of a man who maybe could help me find a way to learn the Paraguayan harp. The man came to visit us with a harpist friend who was in Venezuela for a few days and we all had a wonderful concert at our humble apartment. On his way out we realized the man I had called was the Consul of Paraguay in Venezuela at the time and he gave me the phone number of a Paraguayan harpist who lived in Caracas then: Alberto Romero!!! I had seen him on TV and had his album and could not believe that he lived just a few blocks away in a multi-million population city! The first night I met him he was teaching me for hours and invited

me to return weekly. I was terribly embarrassed to explain to him that I had no money at all for lessons . . . he turned red, upset, and said to me in a strong voice: "Who is talking about money!! See you next week!!" He knew about our economic situation and he never charged me for the lessons. That began in late 1962 and he was my teacher until I went to Medellin, Colombia, to attend medical school, in December of 1963.

I began my medical studies in January 1964 and my first harp job was a wedding reception in the spring of 1964, where an executive of CODISCOS Recording Company was a guest. The following week I was signing my first recording contract. So, the harp paid my way through medical school until graduation in 1970. I recorded 28 albums for that company. Some of them still sell in Columbia on CDs.



I moved to California in early 1975 to pursue specialized studies in Music Therapy at Cal State Long Beach, and I began producing my own albums. (10 CDs are available on my website: www.Alfredo-Rolando-Ortiz.com/music). I married Luz Marina on March 20th, 1977. (We just had our 40th wedding anniversary!) I continued "harping" (performing 7 days a week) along with my medical career (5 days a week at Fairview State Hospital) until my wife became pregnant in 1978. Since then, I have dedicated my life only to my family and the harp (although years later I still diagnosed the appendicitis of both my daughters and a grandson when the doctors thought it was the stomach flu ☺).

When I wrote my first book in 1979, *Latin American Harps History, Music and Techniques*, the printer (who was a friend) was worried about "who would buy it" . . . now in it's Second Printing of the Third Edition, it continues being a source of FUN for all harps, along my all of my other books. (See the sale section below.)

As a composer, I never dreamed that one day my music would be required study at conservatories and universities around the world. Eleven of them are included in the Harp Syllabus of the Associated Board of Royal Schools of Music, used for harp exams in over one hundred countries.



I have always known that VARIETY is very important for us all as performers, to engage the audience (even your friends and family) and for your own FUN. My collections always have a wide variety, from the very romantic to the very exciting and many are inspired by the great loves of my life: My wife of 40 years, Luz Marina, our daughters, Luzma and Michelle, my love for nature . . . music composed to butterflies, rivers, waterfalls, the seashore, the mountains. Yes, I am a romantic and proud of it. ☺

To finish I would like to share two rules I teach all my students: "Play the wrong notes nicely!" (Yes, we all play "those" but the ideal is to play them well!) and the second rule is that to learn those difficult parts or to correct any problems on any music you must practice "slowlier." Yes, I meant "slowlier." I know the word is "wrong" . . . but they "remember it!"

I invite you to explore all my music available from Sylvia's website to add "variety, romance, excitement and more FUN to your repertoire!"



Photos (from top):

- #1. Alfredo today
- #2. Alfredo in 1964
- #3. Alfredo's gold record
- #4. 1977 wedding
- #5. 1987 Edinburgh Harp Festival
- #6. 40th Anniversary 2017
- #7. with grandson Eric