

# Hurricane Irma and culture

The powerful storm caused significant damage that is being gradually repaired, while a wave of solidarity and fraternity has been unleashed

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• THE devastation left by Hurricane Irma across the island caused the nation's cultural institutions serious material damage, but at the same time unleashed among artists a wave of solidarity with the population affected by the powerful winds and the sea's fury.

According to a detailed evaluation conducted by the Ministry of Culture in the 14 provinces reporting hurricane damage - the most serious in Havana, Villa Clara, Matanzas, Camagüey, Ciego de Ávila and Sancti Spíritus - 287 facilities in the country's network of institutions were impacted to some degree.

Neighborhood cultural venues, movie theaters, museums, libraries, recreation centers, and others prepared for the hurricane, in their majority, by safeguarding valuable equipment, such as musical instruments, books, computers, irreplaceable collections, and artistic instruction materials.

To cite a few examples in Havana, roofs were damaged at the Ganabacoa Museum; the Trompoloco Big Tent, the pride of Cuban circus arts; and the Arroyo Naranjo municipal library. Of serious concern was coastal flooding which in Old Havana surged up Prado Boulevard to Trocadero Street, where the Home-Museum of iconic writer José Lezama Lima is located.

Gladys Collazo, president of the National Cultural Patrimony Council, told the press that some documents and paintings stored at its headquarters were dampened, but, "The rapid response of conservators made possible that the affected documents were desalinated within a brief period of time" and that paintings being restored before the storm are undergoing additional work.

An example of preventative measures was shared by Havana's Audiovisual Communication Arts School (FAMCA), where staff removed equipment and safely stored it elsewhere, prior to the storm.

Likewise, thanks to the recovery efforts of workers at the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Arts and Industry (ICAIC), movie theaters in the capital have returned to their regular programming, especially those within the popular Circuit 23, bordered by 23rd Street, Zapata, 12th, and Paseo, in Vedado.

In the neighboring province of Mayabeque, where the hard hit municipality of Santa Cruz is located, Ministry of Culture staff lamented the destruction of stained glass windows in the Counts of Jaruco mansion. Institutions in Villa Clara were damaged and being restored in the provincial capital of Santa Clara, as well as Remedios, site of the well-known Parrandas.

Suffering the effects of powerful winds in Matanzas were the White Theater, which was under restoration prior to Irma, as well as several neighborhood cultural centers and video halls. It was reported that resources needed to repair the roof of the Catalan Hermitage are now on hand.

The country's 37 art schools, with some 9,000 students enrolled and a staff of 6,000, merit special mention, as all are now functioning. Reports indicate that no computer or technical equipment, wardrobe or musical instruments recently imported, were lost.

## BRIGADES OF ARTISTS

On the initiative of the Ministry of Culture, the Cuban Institute of Music, the Hermanos Saíz Association, and the Union of Cuban Writers and Artists, several artistic brigades have been organized to "take a little culture, art, and entertainment to those communities most devastated by the hurricane."

The groups traveling to Villa Clara, Camagüey, Ciego de Ávila, Matanzas and Sancti Spíritus, include a total of some 100 musicians of many genre, singers, actors, storytellers, and circus artists.

These brigades join those working since the beginning of the recovery period in each province, where groups of artists,



Rosario Cárdenas, National Prize for Dance winner, during a rehearsal with her dancers, who are involved in the creation of pieces.

promoters, and art teachers have fanned out to support those affected by the hurricane, including for example, that of Sergio Corrieri in Villa Clara and the Golpe a Golpe project launched by the Hermanos Saíz Association chapter in Camagüey.

More than 30 artistic brigades are at work in the capital. Students from the Advanced Art Institute have performed in the Jaimanitas and Romerillo neighborhoods, while La Colmenita children's theater company has been in Centro Habana, sharing joy and hope through their art with those most affected by hurricane damage.

Many artists are intent upon bringing back smiles to those suffering, but have re-initiated regular performances as well.

The Acosta Danza company presented its new, successful program in the Alicia Alonso Grand Theater; El Público theater company, directed by Carlos Díaz, is back in Tito Junco Hall at the Bertolt Brecht Center with a version of **Así que pasen cinco años** by Federico García Lorca; in the National Theater's Avellaneda Hall, the National Symphonic Orchestra, led by French conductor Natalie Marin, devoted its last Sunday performance to the anniversary of relations between Turkey and Cuba, featuring Cuban soprano Johana Simón and Turkish pianist Deniz Kaya.

And there's more, with Rosario Cárdenas, National Prize for Dance winner, is debuting a new choreography entitled **Afrodita, ¡Oh, espejo!** evoking two deities of passion, love, and jealousy: Aphrodite and the African Ochún.

The devastating power of Hurricane Irma caused serious harm, but unleashed impressive sentiments of fraternity. No doubt about it, Cuba's cultural life is being reestablished. •

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