

# *Arquímedes Pous, one of Cienfuegos most famous sons*

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Since 2003, important conservation and restoration awards have been awarded to centers of cultural, historical and tourist significance in the province. Since 2005, the historic center of the city of Cienfuegos acquired the status of Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The singer Bartolomé Maximiliano Moré Gutiérrez, popularly known as Benny Moré, and Arquímedes Pous, are two of the most important figures of culture in the province. Today we are going to focus on the Cuban actor, author and theatrical entrepreneur, Arquímedes Pous. He was born in the city of Cienfuegos on the 18th of May in 1801, in a wealthy family who wanted to see him become a successful physician. But his passion for the theater was revealed at a very young age, as he improvised stages in his house and he put on pieces written by himself, where he involved his fellow students. After he completed his baccalaureate he went to Havana and enrolled in the Medical School. However, shortly after he abandoned his studies, as opposed to family designs, to devote himself entirely to the stage.

Attracted by the theater-vernacular-Cuban genre, he debuted incognito with the nick name of "negrito" in the Actualities theater of his hometown, in 1906, and during the following years he acted parts in several towns in the provinces. Havana at the time offered little opportunities in the style of acting in which the young Pous had ventured. He was completely unknown in the theatrical environment when he arrived as a performer in the capital.

In 1911 he performed with Angelita Martínez in the Chantecler and Molino Rojo theaters, where he performed what were called duets, being small dialogue scenes that ended with a song and a typical dance number.

Arquímedes popularity began to grow, since from the beginning he developed a style of acting in which a Creole sympathy emerged, coupled with his superb dancing. During the weekly of shows at The Cheerful

Theater, their published his photograph in two numbers of that year of 1911. In July, he performed as a guest artist at the Martí Theater during the tribute to a colleague. The press wrote that rarely had such an ovation been heard, like that paid him on that occasion. The businessman of that coliseum decided to hire the young actor as director of the ensemble. He was accompanied by Conchita Llauro who became his future life partner. In the Martí Theatre, he premiered his first titles: *The Crazy Widow* and the duet, *The Bottle Rack*.

In September of the same year of 1911 he went to work at the Vaudeville, facing Central Park. There he premiered *The Beggar's Song* and *The Cigar Maker*, his first famous titles. This triumph affected the results of a contest of the Teatro Alegre to choose the best and friendliest "negrito". Pous won first place among nine other actors, all recognized performers of the typical character.

From that moment on, it would be true to say that Arquímedes Pous's career traveled an ascending and unstoppable path of triumphs. On more than one occasion Regino López tried to attract him, without ever getting it, to his famous Alhambra theater, preferred by the theatre-loving public at that time. The reality was that Arquímedes was the only vernacular actor capable of confronting Regino López successfully. On the other hand, in 1913 he accepted the proposal of Raúl del Monte, another famous "negrito," and one of those he defeated in the recent contest, to travel with him to Santo Domingo, Puerto Rico and Central America.

Upon his return he appeared, as a recognized actor and with his own company, in his hometown Cienfuegos and in other provinces. The following year, 1914, he took his ensemble to Mexico and repeated his visit to the Caribbean area. On that tour he realized Mérida Carnival, Yucatan Souvenir and *From Mexico I Hail*.

Back in Havana, he worked at the Actualities and Payret theaters and, in July 1916, he premiered his successful title *Las Mulatas de Bambay*, with which he opened a triumphant season at the Payret. His ties with that theater were strengthened by repeating his presentations there until 1921, when he hired the famous exclusive Mexican Luz Gil, until that moment, with the competing company Alhambra. From those years are *The Cuban Submarine*, of 1918; *The Golden Key*, from 1920; the favorite of the great cabaret, *Brisas del Hawaii* from 1921.

He traveled to the United States, hired by Columbia, to record some of his dialogues and musical numbers.

Two years later, in 1923, another great figure defected from the hosts of Regino López. This time, the talented Catalan set designer Pepito Gomís joined Arquímedes Pous in a joint venture. The new entity Pous-Gomís leased the Molino Rojo theatre. The possibility of having a great set designer prompted Pous to create spectacular magazines where, without losing his innate criollism, he reversed the cosmopolitan influences acquired in his recreational trips through Europe and the United States.

At the end of that 1923 season and after acting in Santiago de Cuba, he started out for the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, with the intention of extending the trip to Buenos Aires. In Puerto Rico, he performed for two months at the Tres Banderas Theater, in Santurce, San Juan; then in Arecibo and at the Yagüez theater, in Mayagüez. But Pous had left Cuba besieged by a dire feeling, and began to feel progressively ill. In his third performance, in the last city, he suffered horrible pains, caused by an unattended peritonitis. He died tragically the next day, on April 16, 1926, as he approached his 35th birthday.

For the history of Cuban theater, Arquímedes Pous is an integral paradigmatic figure, insufficiently studied until the present. As an actor, he exhibited great versatility by interpreting all the typical characters of the Creole scene with the same perfection: bold, Galician, gallant, stupid, drunk ... As a fruitful author, he fought to banish bad taste and vulgarity from the national scene, without discarding the mischievousness and double meaning innate to the vernacular genre. Finally, as an entrepreneur, he demonstrated an

unusual dynamism and sense of organization, which explain his successes and his permanent popularity.

He knew how to surround himself with the best collaborators. The composers Eliseo Grenet, Jaime Prats, musical directors in the company, Jorge Anckermann, director of the rival Alhambra, Ernesto Lecuona and Moisés Simons put great music in his librettos. Luz Gil, Conchita Llauro, Luisa Obregón, Mimí Cal, María Bica and Fernando Mendoza stood out in his cast of actors.

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