

Visitors Views about Matanzas



On the 7 March 1851 Swedish author and reformer Fredrika Bremer, wrote her Letters from Cuba or *Cartas Desde Cuba*. The collection was re-published by the Cuban publishing house Editorial Arte y Literatura in Havana in 1995. Here is a selection from what she wrote about the city of Matanzas,

Matanzas, the 23rd. of February, 1851. Matanzas has been built in the same way as Havana, but more liberally; it is more cheerful. It has many narrow streets, although they are not paved. My host's house has two stories and, furthermore, has a long balcony on the second floor, facing the street. Here I stroll in the nights taking the air, while my young hostess plays Cuban contradanzas in the salon with a lively, sprightly rhythm.

One can hear dance music resonating from every house in town. Every place you wander in Matanzas you can hear music for dancing. Its beat and rhythm belong to the Sons of Africa.

Fredrika Bremmer went on to write about the famous violinist José White, about whom more later in this program.

Some Matanceros have become well-known musicians. Among these we will cite only one name here who was well-known in France: José White. His fellow countrymen recognized his amazing gifts when he was yet a youngster, with his violin in his hand. When he arrived in Paris it was only necessary for him to present himself at the Conservatory for him to be received immediately. He joined the class of Alard and left six months later with First Prize... José White traveled through the two Americas where he was universally applauded as a second Siveri.

25 years later French writer Hippolyte Piron. Also described the matanceros in his La Isla de Cuba. Reprinted by Editorial Oriente in Santiago De Cuba in 1994

The Matanceros, the citizens of Matanzas, are much less pietistic than the rest of Cuba...It is a distinctive trait in their character which comes across as surprising in a community rooted in Spain...Simple, generous, proud, they are also intelligent; well gifted in the arts, above all in literature. But mundane preoccupations have led them to forget religious practice. They love more the tangible and perishable things of the earth than the promise of eternal happiness in paradise. In this positivistic spirit they keep credulity within tight limits. Active, restless, industrious and ingenious they are good workers and good merchants.

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