

## Alex Cuba shines at Cleveland Museum of Art's Transformer Station (May 1)

by Max Newman



Cuban-Canadian singer-songwriter Alex Cuba has been described in many ways over the course of his career, from his “sugarcane-sweet melodies” and “pop-soul hooks” to “powerful guitar riffs that relinquish a conventional stereotype that exemplifies much of the Latin music landscape.” When he performed on the Tiny Desk concert series, *NPR* noted his “undeniable charm as he weaves evocative imagery into musical arrangements that not only call to mind his native Cuba but anywhere [that] an acoustic guitar and engaging voice command attention.”

All of these strengths, and more, were on display when Cuba took the stage at

Transformer Station on May 1 as part of the Cleveland Museum of Art's Performing Arts series.

The venue was a unique place to hold this event. Elegant tables with high chairs lined a high-ceilinged room, adorned with plastic chairs and an array of sofas. Cuba was stationed upfront, against a backdrop of pink light and shelves full of candles. He fit perfectly into the space, commanding the audience with his undeniable presence and playing with a level of confidence and skill that only a musician such as himself could.

Indeed, his stage presence was one of the things that instantly stood out. He frequently engaged with the audience, telling jokes and stories that generated laugh after laugh. At times, he put himself in conversation with us, asking questions and offering up plenty of opportunities for sing-alongs. He seemed to be enjoying himself, both during his songs and in between. His ever-present grin was infectious.

The most impressive thing about this concert was Cuba's musicianship. A technically brilliant guitarist, he demonstrated mind-boggling control over his instrument as he played catchy melodies and memorable riffs. There truly was no end to the wonderfully pleasing chord progressions that his setlist was chock-full of.

His tone was mesmerizing — he treated his guitar strings with a firm care, never seeming to stretch them to their limits but hitting every note. Part of this delicacy was down to Cuba's playing style. He mostly strummed with his thumb, using it as a musical base that his other fingers only embellished when needed.

On top of this, Cuba's voice was angelic. "Sugarcane sweet" proved to be the perfect description — his voice was a cold, sweet drink on a summer's day, never falling beneath or rising too far above his dexterous guitar playing.

Throughout the setlist, he easily moved from melancholic songs to blissful tunes to heart wrenching ballads, all while engaging in humorous and affable conversations with the crowd. One pairing from early in the setlist was a great example. *Dividido* featured slowly plucked, winding chords that felt like a soft, refreshing breeze, with crooned lyrics touching on the ways that unrequited love can be found in division. Then came *Lamento*, with a much more somber energy, a melody that seemed to transform tears into musical form, and lyrics that dealt heavily with themes of loss of love. And the transition between the two was flawless. He truly had the audience in the palm of his hand.

Cuba presented a thoroughly enjoyable night of music demonstrating his bags of talent, delivering it all with aplomb for an enthusiastic crowd.

*Photo by Eduardo Rawdriguez*

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com May 6, 2024.*

*Click here for a printable copy of this article*

[Return to the Front Page.](#)