

Silvio Rodríguez Sings of the Special Period

Silvio Rodríguez

With a mixture of irony, pain, hope, and humor, singer-songwriter Silvio Rodríguez (b. 1946) continued to chronicle the revolution in the 1990s, along with the economic and social contradictions that are so ubiquitous now.

The song "Disillusionment" refers to the temptations inherent in the introduction of capitalism, through foreign investment and tourism, into Cuba. If people lose faith in the possibility of constructing a different, better kind of society, he warns, that in itself will contribute to the country's return to the corruption of the 1950s.

In "El necio" Rodríguez reflects on the pressures felt by Cubans, especially well-known Cubans like himself, to defect. If only he would "undefine" himself, he would be admitted into the altars of international commercialism and wealth. Still, an almost religious faith—in the face of apparent evidence to the contrary—that humans are capable of higher, unselfish motives keeps him committed to his vision. The last stanza refers to the fate of revolutionary artists such as Víctor Jara, who was tortured and murdered by the Chilean military after the 1973 coup that overthrew Salvador Allende's socialist government. When Cuba's revolution falls, Rodríguez's imaginary interlocutor suggests, he will suffer the same fate. Nevertheless, he prefers the "foolishness" of faith to the temptations of giving up.

"The Fifties Club" comments on the growing commercialization of Cuban society in the 1990s. As the government became less able to supply citizens' needs, access to the private economy—and to dollars from abroad—became almost a necessity for survival. Here Rodríguez decries not the material scarcities but the moral impoverishment that accompanies competition and materialism.

The song "Flores" (Flowers) refers to the recrudescence of prostitution, especially along the elegant Fifth Avenue of the Miramar neighborhood in Havana, where many foreigners and especially businessmen live or stay in the city's new hotels. Rodríguez seems to sympathize with the spiritual poverty of those—both buyers and sellers—who have turned sex into a commodity.

DISILLUSIONMENT

Like coins
Disillusionment jingles its theme
Disillusionment.
With a red mouth
And big droopy breasts
Disillusionment
Smoking light tobacco
And exhaling alcohol
The owner of the bed embroidered
In underwear.

What frenzy in interrogation
What suicide in investigating
A brilliant fashion show
Disillusionment.

It opened a business
Reviving leisure
Disillusionment.
Like tourism
It invented the abyss
Disillusionment
It touched the diamond
And turned it to coal
And it planted a good-for-nothing
In the administration.

THE FOOL

To keep my icon from being smashed,
To save myself among the few and the odd ones,
To grant me a space in their Parnassus,
To give me a little corner in their altars,
they come to invite me to repent,
they come to invite me not to lose out,
they come to invite me to undefine myself,
they come to invite me to so much bullshit.
I can't say what the future is,
I've always been what I've been,

Only God, up there, is c
I will die just as I've live

I want to keep on bettir
I want to be with the le
I want to make a Cong
I want to pray deeply at
They'll say that crazine
They'll say that people
but I'll leave with my r
(perhaps multiplying br
I can't say what the futu
I've always been what I
Only God, up there, is c
I will die just as I've live

They say that I'll be dra
when the Revolution cc
that they'll smash my h
that they'll tear out my
It may well be that I'm
the foolishness of what
the foolishness of accep
the foolishness of living
I can't say what the futu
I've always been what I
Only God, up there, is c
I will die just as I've live

THE FIFTIES CLUB

I arrive at the club of the
and one hand brings the
The sum (addition) calls
from back to my cradle
Every fire, every undert
 want to do]
comes with a price tag r
in spite of what has been

Only God, up there, is divine.
I will die just as I've lived.

I want to keep on betting on the lost cause,
I want to be with the left hand rather than right,
I want to make a Congress of the united,
I want to pray deeply an "our son."
They'll say that craziness has gone out of fashion,
They'll say that people are evil and don't deserve it,
but I'll leave with my mischievous dreams
(perhaps multiplying bread and fish).
I can't say what the future is,
I've always been what I've been,
Only God, up there, is divine.
I will die just as I've lived.

They say that I'll be dragged over the rocks
when the Revolution comes crashing down,
that they'll smash my hands and my mouth,
that they'll tear out my eyes and my tongue.
It may well be that I'm the child of foolishness,
the foolishness of what today seems foolish:
the foolishness of accepting one's enemy,
the foolishness of living without a price.
I can't say what the future is,
I've always been what I've been,
Only God, up there, is divine.
I will die just as I've lived.

THE FIFTIES CLUB

I arrive at the club of the fifty-year-olds (1950s)
and one hand brings the bill
The sum (addition) calls my attention
from back to my cradle
Every fire, every undertaking [with the implication of something you really
want to do]
comes with a price tag next to it
in spite of what has been paid.

I wonder what kind of business this is
in which even desire becomes an object of consumption
what will I do when the sun sends its bill?
But I keep turning my face to the east
and order another breakfast [using an Anglicism; that is, the word *order* isn't
really used like that in Spanish]
in spite of the cost of love.

Let debts and inflation come,
ious, fines, recessions.
Let the pickpocket try to grab
the taste of my bolero.
Whoever the boss may be
Let him charge me diligently
(that cruel hand will find out
when I send him my bill).

FLOWERS

The night flowers of Fifth Avenue open
For those poor gentlemen who go to the hotel
Flowers that break in the darkness
Flowers of winks of complicity
Flowers whistling suicides
Flowers with a fatal aroma

What gardener has sown our Fifth Avenue
With such a precise nocturnal variety
What is their species, what is their country
What fancy fertilizer nourished their root
Giving them a wild tone
Where could their womb be?

Flowers that go through forbidden doors
Flowers that know what I'll never know
Flowers that string their dream of life
In garlands without faith
Flowers of sheets with eyes
Disposable flowers
Doorbells of desire
Flowers eating the leftovers of love

They sprout, they bour
They are pulled up and
They say that a flower'
When its petals wither
Pale nocturnal flowers
Flowers of disillusionn

TRANSLATED BY AVIVA CHO

They sprout, they bounce, they explode on our Fifth Avenue
They are pulled up and depart with swift air
They say that a flower's job is hard
When its petals wither in the sun
Pale nocturnal flowers
Flowers of disillusionment.

TRANSLATED BY AVIVA CHOMSKY

assumption

m; that is, the word *order* isn't