

La Lupe sings “Qué te pedí”

[Read other posts by Dorothy Potter Snyder](#) March 22, 2018

It is hard for me to think of a performer whose life and art covered more ground in a shorter time than Lupe Victoria Yolí Raymond, *La yiyiyí*, *La Lupe*, the Queen of Latin Soul. Let's put it this way: when they retire a fairly common Hispanic name like Lupe in the world of Latin American popular music, it's like retiring a player's number in the NBA. You get my point.

In Cuba, she attracted an all-star international following, from Ernest Hemingway to Simone de Beauvoir; and fellow Cuban singer Celia Cruz, whom she admired and who gave La Lupe's career a boost and a new trajectory by recommending her to New York bandleader Mongo Santamaría. La Lupe could do it all: *bolero*, *son montuno*, *cha cha cha*, *boogaloo*, *salsa*.

That made it hard for me to select one tune for this post: should I show you La Lupe singing “El Carbonero” (The Coal-seller), all her limbs in motion like a bird trying to escape a cage as she rides the rhythm and then ends the song by cheekily smacking her own lamé-wrapped bottom three times? Should I share the soaring bolero “La Gran Tirana”, its extended and serrated notes, reminding of a young Eartha Kitt?

My friend, trumpeter, composer and bandleader [Tim Ouimette](#), used to study with the great Panamanian trumpeter [Victor Vitin Paz](#). Tim would go nuts in his sessions with Paz, because month after month, all Victor said to him was: *Find your note Teem!* Or, *Teem, have you find your note yet?* Paz kept insisting on this as my friend wore out his embouchure in the effort. (I am glad to say he finally found “his note”.) What Paz was insisting on was not

just accuracy, not just tone: it was *duende*.

I choose this searing bolero, “¿Qué te pedí?” (What Did I Ask of You?) by Mexican composer [Gabriel Luna de la Fuente](#) because it demonstrates to perfection La Lupe’s “note”, that piercing *gemido*, that inimitable wail that was hers alone. We hear it in the first phrase into which she packs all the searing agony of not being understood by the person you love the most, and your fury when you realize you’ve thrown away your devotion on someone who doesn’t appreciate it. Here, La Lupe seems to be in a last, mortal effort to pierce the incomprehension of her lover, traveling an emotional roller coaster that, at its heights, condemns him and, at its depths, accepts that her mortal wound will be her only reward.

¿Qué te pedí?

Que no fuera leal comprensión,
que supieras que no hay
en la vida otro amor
como mi amor.

¿Qué no te dí?

Que pudiera en tus manos poner,
que aunque quise robarme la luz para tí
no pudo ser.

What did I ask of you

But your faithful understanding

That you should know there is

No love in this life

Quite like my love?

What didn't I give you

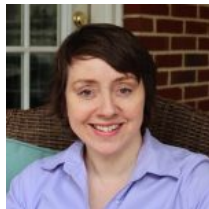
But whatever I could place in your hands?

And even though I wanted to steal the very light for you,

It wasn't to be.

Damas y caballeros, les presento: La Lupe singing “[¿Qué te pedí?](#)”

La Lupe Que Te Pedi



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