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Daniel Noriega: A Cuban Surgeon and Vocalist

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One of the male members of Cuba's Coro Vocal Leo choir, tenor soloist Daniel Noriega, also holds a medical degree and practices plastic surgery. Would one think the two careers are compatible?

HT: How did you discover the artist in you?

Daniel Noriega: I've had artistic inclinations since I can remember. Even though there is no history of artistic expression in my family, I made my parents enroll me in piano lessons. I started my formal music training at music conservatories at a very early age, learning to play the clarinet and, later, choir music. I graduated in this last discipline under the tutelage of the renowned music teacher Gladys Puig.

HT: What is your specialization in medicine?

DN: I specialize in plastic surgery and burns.

HT: Is there any connection between the singer and the physician?

DN: There is a very strong connection. Their common denominator is sensitivity. I am a plastic surgeon, which, ultimately, is a kind of art applied to the human body.

Vocal Leo in the Casa del ALBA

HT: Both of your professions demand time. How do you manage your time?

DN: I studied medicine and music at the same time. I was a founding member of the Vocal Leo choir 21 years ago. I had to learn to distribute and manage my time so that I could carry out the two activities. It was very complicated at first, but I managed to find the time for each.

HT: Tell us about Vocal Leo.

DN: It is the peak of my professional realization, though I've participated in competitions and held concerts as

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soloist. I always dreamt of being able to sing in a great choir. One of the aesthetic characteristics of Vocal Leo is high-register singing. This requires training, as does the repertoire chosen by the music teacher and director of the choir Corina Campos.

HT: What music do you like as a tenor?

DN: As a tenor, I like the music from Europe's romantic period, lieder, chansons and concert music in general. Because I am a light tenor, I don't like the operatic repertoire written for these types of tessituras, I've always preferred to work with concert repertoires, which are very complex and aren't often performed.

Daniel Noriega with Leo Brouwer

HT: What's it like having these two professions in a country like Cuba?

DN: Precisely because I live in Cuba I was able to study in two programs as demanding as these. The hard part is practicing both of them simultaneously, and that's where the challenge came in. The top priority is offering my patients top-quality attention, particularly those in the burns unit, where my artistic sensibility also comes in. In the afternoon and nights, I enter the magical and cathartic world of music and destine all of my emotions to singing.

I'm roughing it, Cuban-style. The two have been a means of professional realization and a source of income.

HT: If you had to choose between the two, which would you keep?

DN: One is an extension of the other. It would be like choosing between air and water.

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