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Cuba marks 100th birthday of legendary singer Benny More

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Cuba, in particular its southern province of Cienfuegos, is celebrating the 100th birthday of the island's most famous composer and singer of popular music, Benny More.

Born in 1919, in Santa Isabel de las Lajas, a town in Cienfuegos, about 250 km southeast of Havana, More is remembered every Aug. 24 in his hometown, and his centenary celebrations are now seen across the whole island.

As every year, people in Santa Isabel de las Lajas marched from the main square to the grave of the artist, now a national monument. Families, friends, artists and music fans laid flowers and sang his songs along the way to the monument.

A cultural gala "Waiting for the Centenary" was held Friday evening at the Benny More Cultural Art Center in Cienfuegos, where several acknowledged music bands from the island performed.

For the people of Cienfuegos, More is a symbol of Cuba's musical excellence. A life-size bronze in central Cienfuegos Municipality, the capital city of the province, marks people's reverence for the artist.

The statue has become a must-see attraction for visitors since its erection in 2004.

"Benny is the symbol of Cienfuegos, but he is a figure that goes beyond this province because he was a true musical genius who made the Cuban music known to the world," Adelina Gonzalez, a teacher, told Xinhua.

Son of a single mother and grandson of African slaves, Bartolome Maximiliano More, his real name, was nourished by his ethnic African roots together with the Spanish music traditions.

As a child, he learned to play the guitar and sang at parties until he moved to Havana in 1940, where he spent years performing in cafes, streets and parks.

In 1945 he joined the famous Matamoros band and started an international career in Mexico that would take him in the next two decades to Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Jamaica, Haiti and the United States.

The peak of his career came with the creation of his own "The Giant Band," which he called "The Tribu." It debuted in the Cuban capital on Aug. 3, 1953.

The musical genius did not stop working during his last days when he suffered from liver cirrhosis. He died of the disease at the age of 43 on Feb. 16, 1963.

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