

## AZ Insider: Phoenix Producers Organize Cuba Arts Trips

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Kathy Shayna Shocket has the inside view on the stories that make headlines.



### From ballet to music, the trip is an arts aficionados exchange!

For those looking for a unique cultural experience in the finest hotels and restaurants, exploring the music, dance and visual arts of Cuba, a Phoenix based non-profit music company has now organized a major trip.

Veteran producers Woody Wilson, president and founder of the non-profit Lakeshore Music jazz series at Tempe Center for the Arts; and Neil Birnbaum executive director of Northwest Sinfonietta, have spent the past four years exploring Cuba's creative arts. In the process, they've built a cultural exploration of Cuba. They say it's a new benchmark for the People to People tours now allowing Americans to legally visit Cuba on a limited basis.



Featuring a mix of jazz and classical programs (including a rehearsal of the **Nacional Ballet de Cuba**), Wilson and Birnbaum are appealing to arts aficionados. For the first trip of the year, they will take up to 30 travelers to Cuba for an insight into the creative lives of the island's artists and musicians. The following trip they'll take an another group to accompany eminent Chilean conductor, Maximiano Valdés, who will conduct the Orquesta Nacional de Cuba.



"The picturesque island nation of Cuba is just 90 miles from Florida, but to most Americans it might as well be the far side of the moon," says Woody Wilson. He emphasizes that the Rhythm & Views is different from other trips because their cultural experiences are in private homes, intimate performance spaces, concert halls and Cuba's leading arts schools.

Woody very artistically explains that as the diplomatic dialogue between the United States and the Republic of Cuba continues to evolve after 54 years of embargo, the sanctioned People-to-People cultural and educational exchanges between the two countries are steadily increasing as Americans become more intrigued about Cuba.



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