

Introduction

Eusebia Adriana Cosme y Almanza was born in Santiago de Cuba in 1911, the only child of Leocadia Almanza and German Cosme. Her parents died when she was still a minor, and she was befriended by a distinguished Santiago family who eventually took her to Habana. There, Cosme studied music and piano theory at the Escuela Municipal de Musica and elocution and declamation at the Academia de Declamacion of the Conservatorio Municipal. It was at the Conservatorio that Cosme received her first professional encouragement from one of her teachers, Graziella Garbalosa.

Cosme's career as an interpreter of Afro-Antillian verse began in the early 1930s when she was asked to recite for José Gonzalez Marin, a Spanish actor and reciter. Marin then sponsored her public debut at the Teatro Payret in Habana. Prior to that Cosme had performed only for friends and at school functions.

From the inception of her career, Cosme's recitals were interpretative performances with background scenery and costumes that she designed. Her concerts featured primarily the works of Hispanic poets who wrote "poesias negras," poetry with a black theme. However, she also performed the works of Langston Hughes and Paul Laurence Dunbar. Among her favorite poets were Nicolas Guillen, Felix B. Caignet (Cuba), Luis Pales Matos (Puerto Rico), and Andres Eloy Blanco (Venezuela). They, as well as other poets, often wrote works expressly for her, one of which was "Pintame Angelitos Negros" by Eloy Blanco. Additionally, Cosme did dramatic readings from the Afro-Antillian literary genre. She is essentially noted for her performance of Hilda Perera Soto's *Cuentos de Apolo*.

In 1937, Cosme left Cuba to begin her career as an international concert performer. She appeared in South America, the Caribbean, Europe, and the United States. Wherever she went she received critical and popular acclaim and was considered the most successful Cuban diseuse of Afro-Antillian verse. Upon leaving Cuba, Cosme settled in New York City. During the 1940s she had her own radio program there, "The Eusebia Cosme Show" on Columbia Broadcasting System's Las Cadenas de las Americas, doing dramatic readings and poetry recitals. It was apparently during this period that Cosme married Frederick Laviera.

In 1955, Cosme began her acting career with a Mexican acting company. She appeared in a few plays including a Mexican production of "El Derecho de Nacer" (The right to be born), a drama written by Caignet, the Cuban poet/author. The play was made into a movie in 1966, with Cosme in one of the major roles, and was an immediate success. For her interpretation of the role of "Mama Dolores," Cosme was chosen best actress and received the Onix Award, the Mexican version of the Oscar, from the Instituto Cinematografico de la Universidad Ibero-Mexicana. Her movie acting career had begun in 1964 with her appearance as Mrs. Ortiz in Sidney Lumet's *The Pawnbroker*.

The favorable public and critical response to "El Derecho de Nacer," and particularly to the character of "Mama Dolores," led Caignet to write a screenplay entitled "Mama Dolores" (1970) in which Cosme repeated her role. This was followed by acting parts in four other Mexican movies. During this period Cosme resided in Mexico. She also continued to give occasional concert performances in South America and Europe.

Among Cosme's other talents were music composition and painting. She composed the music and lyrics for the theme song to "Mama Dolores," as well as songs that were sung by popular singers of the day. Her painting career received its impetus from her husband's death

in the late 1950s. An abstract painter, Cosme exhibited her works in several of the annual Washington Square Outdoor Art Exhibitions in New York City, as well as in Mexico.

Eusebia Cosme died in Miami some time in the late 1970s.