

MUSICIANS AND BANDS OF VALENCIA



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THE FESTIVALS AND COMPETITIONS HELD EACH YEAR PROVIDE THE MOTIVE FOR THE BANDS TO PERFECT THEIR MUSIC. THE RIVALRY AND THE WISH TO TRIUMPH MAKE FOR LONG HOURS OF STUDY AND REHEARSALS.

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“Music composes discomposed souls and lightens the work arising from the spirit”. CERVANTES

Amongst the Valencians one finds musicians wherever one goes. This may well be a commonplace, but the reality ensures its survival. In any village or outlying city district it's easy to find a band of musicians and the corresponding musical association that runs it. In the País Valencià there are a total of more than four hundred federated bands and more than 35,000 musicians.

The origin of this tradition is fairly recent. The first band associations were set up in the nineteenth century. Gradually, during this century, every town and village put together its own band, frequently of between forty and eighty musicians. Rivalry and imitation, enthusiasm and high spirits, the logical aspirations of new initiatives and outlooks... all come together in a unique combination to form this unequalled ethnographic phenomenon. This is something unknown in the rest of Europe today. The expansive, easy-going Mediterranean character, a love

of performing, the warm breeze and the weight of tradition encourages large numbers of boys and girls to study music and dream of success. Or else the young simply want to enjoy themselves with the artistic experience that lies closest to hand. The musical activity in the towns and villages is the culture's most widespread and visible sociological phenomenon. Every self-respecting town has a music society and an administrative board responsible for channelling a large number of individual efforts and shared aspirations. Behind the melodies is an important



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job of administration. The least each society has to have is teachers specializing in music theory, woodwind, brass and percussion, under the supervision of a conductor. And apart from finding young people prepared to give up television or football to study music, funds are needed to cover the considerable expenses. The financial structure of these bands rests on members' subscriptions, but is founded on institutional subventions and day-to-day fund-raising (lotteries, donations and performances by the band). Each musical society's members lead the way with their financial and moral support, but local authorities, provincial corporations and the Department of Culture face the challenge of maintaining and improving on the present situation. For example, the campaign "Música 92", promoted by the Department of Culture, Education and Science, has made donations of pianos to each society, and has also made it possible to rehabilitate club premises. A complex financial and cultural structure lies behind the musical network of the País Valencià. For example, the purchase and renovation of instruments involves large quantities of money. A saxophone (of the sort normally used in an average band) can cost 200,000 pesetas; a clarinet, trumpet or trombone –nothing special– can cost 100,000 pe-

setas each; a double bass, at least 700,000 pesetas. Mouthpieces, reeds, scores and study material, costumes... all adds up to a surprisingly lively business. Alongside the sharp-eyed businessman, the craftsman, with his fantastic knowledge of instruments, still lives on. In Valencia, in one of the city's traditional tradesmen's districts (known as El Carme or Ciutat Vella), Senyor Martínez can fix instruments that have been played by fifty mouths or spot the badly fitting stop on a new clarinet. It's true that we Valencians haven't developed a musical technology comparable with that of the French, English or Americans, but these places full of old instruments, where a handful of craftsmen find answers to the little problems that crop up in keys and bellows, also have their fascination.

The towns of Lliria, Cullera and Buñol stand out in the music scene, each having two bands of high musical quality recognized by the many prizes won in international contests.

Today there is almost a mythology attached to the phenomenon our grandparents took it on themselves to pass on to us. Some European music clubs came to Lliria and were fascinated by the quality and the quantity of its musicians. Those ruddy faces, burnt from working in the fields, and those swollen fingers,

deformed by the work of the artisan, made it seem all the more unlikely. The Europeans couldn't believe it: the next day the president and board of one of Lliria's bands took the European musicians on a guided tour of the everyday life of the Valencian musicians. They went to see the smith, the carpenter, the carrier... and they visited the fields outside the town. They saw the same men who the night before had been making music fit for the angels hard at work next morning on a thousand and one jobs that had nothing to do with the music profession. And some of them had got up at five or six in the morning to go to the factory or start the day. It's in the amateur, disinterested nature of the thousands of musicians that the charm and seduction lie.

That's Lliria: a town that lives for music. But to some extent and in differing degrees every town is the same. Everywhere you go, as you take a quiet walk, you hear the sound of instruments and the children going over their exercises. Here you hear a tuba and there a trumpet. The neighbours are used to it and the hours of practising are just another part of the musical geography of Valencia. The musician, like the blacksmith, learns his trade through hard work.

The festivals and competitions (organised according to the number of musi-



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cians) held each year provide the motive for the bands to perfect their music. The rivalry and the wish to triumph make for long hours of study and rehearsals. But at the same time it's the chance to meet with fellow enthusiasts that is so important for a scattered society like Valencia's. Music is a pretext for the thousands of activities that spring up around the bands (talks, theatre, choirs, human relations, etc.), filling leisure centres but at the same time indirectly promoting the clubs' activity, democratic participation and the use of our language. The whole phenomenon is worthy of recognition. Musical activity is an aesthetic and communicative experience that supports ego-construction and at the same time is a powerful means of socialization. For many years the musical societies have been the centre of cultural life in the towns.

There is also musical rivalry within towns that have more than one band. The famous rivalry between La Primitiva and La Unió Musical de Lliria has spread to towns like Buñol, Cullera, Alcoi, Carcaixent, Montcada, Carlet and Sueca. Stories of jealousy and rivalry abound: married couples who don't speak to each other because they belong to different bands; fireworks to celebrate a victory, but let off on the rival society's doorstep; musicians who sit in

the front row so as to bring out defects in their opponents; feuding and gibes between neighbours. During the Second Republic each band's casino acquired its own ideological connotations (each social group identified with a different band), something that still happens today.

The traditional repertory has been added to with "pasodobles", Valencian band music, "zarzuela", marches and the bands' own orchestral adaptations. Chapí, Bretón, Serrano are inevitable names in the files of each society. The authorities' current programme "Retrobem la nostre música" (Let's rediscover our music) sets out to publicize the compositions and band music by contemporary Valencian figures: Manuel Palau, Bernat Adam Ferrero, Manuel Penella, Salvador Giner, Josep M.^a Izquierdo, Francesc Tamarit Fayos, Miquel Asins Carbó, Rafael Talens Pelló, Amand Blanquer, Josep M.^a Cervera Collado.

The sound of the bands isn't always the best for playing symphonic arrangements, so that sometimes, depending on the artistic quality, the courage of some musicians shows a certain irreverence towards these great works (for example, those of Wagner or Tchaikovsky). But this is a risk one has to take if these skillful Valencian musicians, with their

generally high technical level but their lack of musical education, are to be familiarized with serious music.

There are large numbers of Valencian musicians in bands and orchestras all over Spain. But there are obvious differences in technique and sound between working for one or the other. The work is doubled when one has to adapt one's way of understanding the instrument so as to integrate it in orchestral work. The habits acquired in childhood and youth have to be shaped to provide new acoustic impacts. The move away from exclusively festive music and into symphonic music will be a good training for the bands.

Now that the trend towards self-taught improvisation is a thing of the past, the future presents a series of challenges. At present what is needed is a greater presence of stringed instruments and investment in teaching and in youth bands. But it's especially important that music should be made part of school education from the very start. With the right syllabus, schools can face the challenge before them of introducing children to this language, to this side of art and culture. As J.J. Rousseau said, "The most beautiful melodies will never mean anything to those who are not used to listening to them. It is a language that needs a dictionary". ■