

# On the centenary of Manuel Cubeles

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Musician and music teacher. Commissioner of the Year Manuel Cubeles

The Department of Culture of the Generalitat of Catalonia, through the General Directorate of Popular Culture and Cultural Associations, has promoted the celebration of the Year of Manuel Cubeles on the centenary of his birth. Manuel Cubeles i Solé (Barcelona, 25 December 1920 - la Garriga, 19 December 2017) is one of the leading names in the *Esbarts* movement and traditional dance in Catalonia, but, at the same time, he also stands out for his forays into other areas of culture.

As a member of the *Lleva del Biberó*, he claimed to be a member of the legion of silence (generation of silence, in the words of Pere Baltà), to refer to the generation of young people who endured the front lines of the war and tough Francoist repression. As a young man, he had been a member of the Federation of Young Christians of Catalonia. Once the war ended, he took on the challenge of a friend of his, the lawyer, politician and historian Josep Benet, and, despite his limp from war wounds, he began his unique adventure to perform traditional dance, a tool in the reconstruction of the country, which culminated with the official presentation of *Esbart Verdaguer*, on 18 April 1948, at the

Palau de la Música Catalana, with all the artistic and emotional impact it entailed. Around 1944 he had joined the tenor group of the *Orfeó Català* and in 1945, with maestro Francesc Pujol, taking as reference the *Obra del Cançoner*, they laid the foundations of the *Obra del Ballet Popular* from the underground. In 1946 he joined the work of the Abbot Oliba Commission. And at the end of 1953 he left *Esbart Verdaguer* to start a new stage at *Esbart Sarrià*. It must be said that the two *Esbarts* have been a beacon and a point of reference until today. In the period 1956-1960, he collaborated with the *Agrupació Dramàtica de Barcelona (ADB)*, as stage director, especially in the *L'Alegria que Torna* projects. In 1962 and 1963, with Josep Romeu, he directed the first editions of the Medieval Theatre Series at the *Saló del Tinell i la Passió* in Barcelona. At RNE, he was scriptwriter and head of studies, as well as responsible for the first programme in Catalan at RNE, in 1969, *Paraula i pensament*. He also worked at TVE, from its opening in Barcelona in 1959, where he ended up as head of production and from where he promoted the first broadcasting of theatre in Catalan on television, in 1964. He was also the ideologist and promoter of the *Castellblanch Art Endowment (1969-1973)*. From the eighties of the last century he actively returned to the world of traditional dance with new choreographies, scripts... and collaborating with numerous projects and performances.



Logo of the Year Manuel Cubeles (2020), made from an image by photographer Ramon Bargués of Manuel Cubeles in a rehearsal of *Esbart Verdaguer*.

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE OF THE GENERALITAT OF CATALUNYA AND MANUEL CUBELES FAMILY ARCHIVE

## Manuel Cubeles Year

In addition to the numerous events that entities and institutions have been programming throughout this Manuel Cubeles Year, the same organising committee has also promoted projects and proposals, trying to, on the one hand, invite knowledge and dissemination of the movement of the *esbarts* and of traditional Catalan dance as a whole and, on the other hand, contribute to making it more visible in its multiple expressions in today's society as a whole.

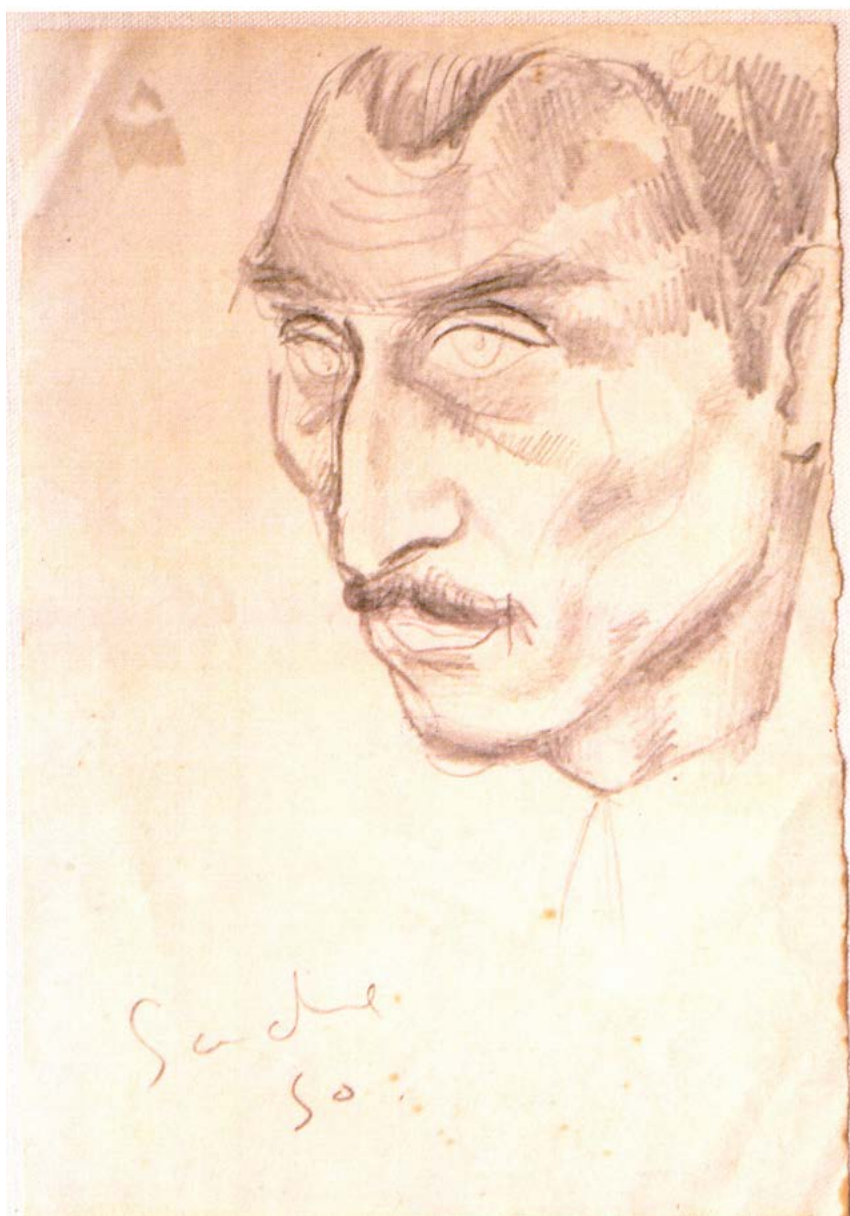
The opening ceremony of the Manuel Cubeles Year, conceived by Jordi Lara, was held on 6 February 2021 -streaming-, at the Teatre del Casino of *Aliança del Poblenou*. It was a tribute to the man, the choreographer, the activist and the protagonist of the fundamental role of popular culture in the recon-

struction of the country, but it also had the slogan of projecting his legacy towards new generations.

The music of Manuel Cubeles' ballets. *Esbart Verdaguer and Esbart Sarrià (1948-1961)* is a musical album by the *Cobla de Cambra de Catalunya*, directed by Jesús Ventura, with 23 pieces -to one or two *cobles* -, from the period 1948-1961, which correspond to the Cubeles stage in the Verdaguer and Sarrià sections. This has been a project that has been worked on with *Músics per la Cobla* and a second album is planned with materials from the resumption of Cubeles in the world of Esbarts from 1980.

The *Miscellània d'homenatge a Manuel Cubeles* offers various looks at Cubeles and his work. The edition was edited by Pilar López and Josep Garcia. It is organised in five chapters: "Biography", "Traditional Catalan dance", "The other Cubeles", "Country and memory" and "Conversations". It includes 27 texts, by around twenty authors, and 12 interviews. It also aims to be an invitation to continue researching Manuel Cubeles in his various fields and, in a special way, his unique contribution to traditional Catalan dance.

The contribution of Manuel Cubeles to traditional dance: Training days for directors, dance teachers, monitors and dancers is a joint training project with the *Agrupament d'Esbarts* to spread their more technical contribution to traditional dance: body technique exercises, foot and arm positions, the way of walking, the points and steps, the musical work... At the same time, practical application is sought with a suitable repertoire. At the time these lines were written, it was scheduled to take place in October (23 and 30) and November (6 and 13) 2021 at Espona - Centre for Traditional Catalan Dance in Rubí.



Portrait of Manuel Cubeles made by Alexandre Cirici (1950). MANUEL CUBELES FAMILY ARCHIVE

The proposals for dance performances based on his work and grouped in a joint promotion catalogue are another piece of good news for this Manuel Cubeles Year: *Esbart Manresà* (Vinyes); *Esbart Dansaire de Rubí* (The *Esbart de Rubí* dances Manuel Cubeles); *Esbart Marboleny*, from *Les Preses* (La difícil senzillesa); *Esbart Maragall*, from Barcelona (*Línia i llum. Cubeles, el mestre*); *Esbart Sant Martí*, from Barcelona (Manuel Cubeles and *Esbart Sant Martí*), and *Esbart Marboleny*, from *Les Preses* (*Hi havia una vegada... —Once upon a time...—*). The six pro-

posals could be seen during 2021 and can also be enjoyed during 2022.

So that during 2021 and the beginning of 2022 Manuel Cubeles will be present all over the country with artistic proposals based on his work, *esbart* dances, conferences, concerts...: *Dansàneu* festival; *Amb So de Cobla* festival; *Ésdansa* festival; *Toca-sons* festival; *Memorial Joaquim Serra*; *Palau de la Música Catalana*, *Espai de Dansa d'Arrel Tradicional, de les Preses*; *l'Espona - Centre de Dansa Tradicional Catalana de Rubí*; *Casal*



Manuel Cubeles i Solé (2007). Photograph: Carlos Cabanyes. ARCHIVE OF THE ESBART MARBOLENY

del Centre Parroquial de Sarrià; Casa dels Entremesos; Act commemorating the death of Enric Prat de la Riba, in Castellterçol, Cultural Association Day (DASC); Fira Mediterrània... and many other proposals that you can find on the Manuel Cubeles Year web space that the Department of Culture has enabled: [culture.gencat.cat/ca/temes/commemorations/2021/anymanuelcubeles/inici](https://cultura.gencat.cat/ca/temes/commemorations/2021/anymanuelcubeles/inici).

As for the closing ceremony, it is planned for the month of February 2022. In fact, both the inaugural event and the first scheduled events scheduled for the last quarter of 2020 had to be postponed to 2021 due to the pandemic.

This Manuel Cubeles Year is, therefore, a very good opportunity to get

closer to his work, and, from a frank and open perspective, we will be able to reinterpret it more and better as we get more information. Today's generations would do well to approach Manuel Cubeles. Certainly, we are not short of references and, even if it is to disagree with them, their contribution is unique and important enough to continue to take it into account. Some of his famous phrases, such as "An *esbart* that dances to dance does not interest me" or "If traditional dance had not existed, we would have had to invent it", already give us an idea of the true dimension of the character. ■

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