

## **Expressive tempo modifications in zarzuela performance: The evidence from early recordings**

To someone listening with unaccustomed ears, one of the most conspicuous style traits in recordings made in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century will likely be the approach to tempo and rhythm, typically more relaxed than we are used to. Written note values might not always be strictly respected; the pulse might be flexible for a couple of beats, a bar or longer. Such tempo modifications and their expressive uses within performance practices going back to the early nineteenth century have been discussed in literature about violin<sup>1</sup> and piano,<sup>2</sup> as well as bel canto.<sup>3</sup> Lesser known is their role within the expressive code of genres and styles we regard as vernacular, such as Spanish *zarzuela*. Recordings of the genre made between 1896 and 1950 – from the first phonograph wax cylinders to the first LPs – indeed give us an opportunity to map out and understand, as is the aim of this article, how performers used different kinds of tempo modifications with expressive aims, how these modifications operated within the broader expressive code of the genre, and how their use changed over time.

Whereas there is by now a certain tradition in studies of early recordings and performance practice to focus on discrete performance parameters (portamento, voice production, vibrato, ornamentation, etc.) so as to facilitate synchronic and diachronic comparison and the identification of stylistic change, in this article I purposefully examine tempo modifications as one part of a broader expressive code, and as such my close readings of the corpus of recordings under study will also often make reference to other parameters. Patrick N. Juslin figuratively describes the process of identifying which performance features map out to which “emotion categories” as “breaking the code”,<sup>4</sup> and this notion of process is indeed

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<sup>1</sup> Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performance*, 376.

<sup>2</sup> Peres da Costa, *Off the Record*.

<sup>3</sup> Zicari, “Expressive tempo modifications” and *The voice of the century*.

<sup>4</sup> Juslin, *Musical Emotions Explained*, C8.P5.

fundamental to my deployment of the term “expressive code” here, which I understand as a set of performance gestures, parameters and decisions a performer would enlist to produce what a historical audience would regard as an expressive performance,<sup>5</sup> and one that would fall within their expectations of what *zarzuela* should sound like, even if allowing room for variability owing to personal preference or the circumstances of the event (which, crucially for this article, include the ways in which recording technologies were engaged with in each recording). Indeed, when listening to these recordings, we do not hear tempo modifications in isolation, but combined with other parameters: the sense of archaism we might get from them, for example, is not determined solely by tempo modifications, but by its combination with portamento and certain types of vocal delivery. Similarly, when performance styles (not necessarily in *zarzuela*, but more generally) started to change in the interwar period, it was not solely tempo modifications which were abandoned, but portamento and certain types of vocal delivery too.<sup>6</sup> In using the term “expressive code”, therefore, I aim to center the interdependency between discrete parameters, as well as the communicative and historically situated nature of performance: indeed, *zarzuela* audiences would have been able to make sense of specific performance events by recourse to their experience of past performances and hence their understanding of how certain gestures might have intended to evoke certain emotions, cause certain effects or communicate certain notions of meaning in the genre’s context. This article assumes that tempo modifications, by deviating from a piece’s global tempo – set up by the character of the piece itself and by convention –, typically had an expressive intention that can, to an extent, be decoded through comparison of recordings and through careful examination of variables such as the rate of tempo modification, where in the

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<sup>5</sup> I privilege “expressive” rather than “emotional”, following Fabian, Schubert and Timmers (“Introduction”) to account for the fact that specific performance parameters and gestures might not map out neatly to specific emotions, but rather to a more fluid notion of “expressivity” which admits and is indeed to a great extent based upon variability and deviation from a perceived norm.

<sup>6</sup> Leech-Wilkinson, “Portamento and musical meaning”, 150-8.

piece it appears, and how it interfaces with other performance parameters such as portamento or voice production.

Crucially, this article does not regard recordings as mere witnesses of how this expressive code was deployed on stage, but rather as active players which shaped and molded performance practices. Such a view is consonant with earlier musicological and performance literature, particularly that more willing to integrate cultural and philosophical concepts in the study of recordings. Mark Katz famously subsumed some of these dynamics under the name of “phonograph effect”: certain parameters of stage performance practice might not translate well into recorded form (be it because of technological limitations, be it because of listening habits specific to record listeners) and are hence adapted or modified in the studio; over time, such adaptations and modifications might become the norm in live performance as well.<sup>7</sup>

Katz’s conceptualization can be understood as a variant of historical dynamics described by other authors who have written on how musical change is interlinked with technological development: music and technology are understood to constantly influence one another, with “historical, social, and cultural factors”, as put by Paul Théberge, giving rise to “desires”, say, for specific instruments, sounds or experiences.<sup>8</sup>

Increasingly, however, more authors have problematized the bond between recording technologies and music/performance practices: it is not simply that technological developments influence music, but rather that music-making is technological, with musical practices and objects often having technology embedded at its core from its very genesis.<sup>9</sup> Recently, Karin Martensen has argued for the reconceptualization of the recorded operatic voice as “sound”, incorporating not only performance parameters (vibrato, tessitura, etc.) but

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<sup>7</sup> Katz, *Capturing sound*, 102; Katz, “Portamento and the Phonograph Effect.”

<sup>8</sup> Théberge, *Any sound you can imagine*, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Tomlinson names this as a core characteristic of music-making since its very origins: “Musicking was always technological. Its modes of cognition were shaped from the first by the extensions of the body that were the earliest tools and weapons, in ways that left a deep imprint on both sociality and the genome”. Tomlinson, *A million years of music*, 48.

also the singer's body and the recorded medium ("Tonaufzeichnung").<sup>10</sup> Patrick Feaster has conceptualized early sound recordings as a set of "generic conventions" that determined how sound was presented and organized to audiences, in ways that were sometimes markedly different from "established musical and narrative categories".<sup>11</sup>

Individual recordings are, at the same time, unashamedly historical artefacts: it is not technology in the abstract that is embedded in each of them, but rather specific technologies that were in use at that time, as well as discourses, practices and ideologies regarding those technologies and their place in society. These can range, for example, from individual performers' attitudes towards technology, to broader cultural discourses on recorded sound. In the discussion that follows I will be treating recordings as artefacts that have technology embedded at its core and I will attempt to explain how particular iterations of tempo modifications can allow us a glimpse into developments attitudes and discourses about technologies in Spain, which I briefly discuss at the beginning of the next section.

### **Pre-electrical recordings (1896-1925)**

At various points between 1896 and 1905, about forty *gabinetes fonográficos* (phonographic cabinets) were active throughout Spain, selling wax cylinders they recorded themselves employing local singers. It was indeed the *gabinetes* which produced the earliest commercial recordings of *zarzuela*, of which about three hundred survive.<sup>12</sup> From 1899, *zarzuela* was also recorded on Gramophone discs, firstly by touring engineers, and then from 1903 by the

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<sup>10</sup> Martensen, "Der Soundbegriff: Eine Methode zur Beschreibung des Phänomens ,Operngesangsstimme'?", 143-50.

<sup>11</sup> Feaster, "Framing the Mechanical Voice", 91.

<sup>12</sup> The main collections of *gabinetes* cylinders are those at Biblioteca Nacional de España (Madrid), Eresbil Centro de la Música Vasca (Errenteria), and Museu de la Telecomunicació Vicente Miralles Segarra (Valencia). *Zarzuela* is the third most numerous genre, following brass bands and opera, and followed at a considerable distance by flamenco.

newly inaugurated Gramophone branch in Barcelona, and subsequently by Odeon and other smaller companies.

The early music industry in Spain – and elsewhere – was a fast-paced environment rich in experimentation and trial-and-error. *Gabinete* owners and private recordists were engaged in developing new additions to the phonograph and new recording techniques (often shared through the Valencia-based publication *Boletín fonográfico*) allowing them to record music better. As the gramophone took over and the phonograph was abandoned, recording processes became more streamlined through the 1900s and especially the 1910s, but experimentation still played an important role.<sup>13</sup> This, as we will see, allows us to read some of the tempo modifications we hear in these recordings as attempts at overcoming specific perceived technological or generic challenges, rather than as universally accepted production standards at a given time, as I will do with reference to specific recordings.

Experimentation also reached into broader matters of labor, trade, and audience-building. Hiring practices changed substantially in the course of these three decades: in *gabinete* recordings we rarely hear the most renowned *zarzuela* singers of their time, as the industry was still precarious and its prestige had yet to be established (many *gabinetes* were indeed a one- or two-man operation, or were a side-line to an established business, such as a pharmacy or an optician). As recordings became more mainstream, in no small part thanks to Enrico Caruso's example, *zarzuela* discs in the gramophone era became more concentrated on a few star performers; this means that recordings from different eras might be reflecting different standards of performance.

Both the *gabinetes* and the recording multinationals also experimented when searching for new audiences. The *gabinetes*' products were always relatively expensive; therefore, and

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<sup>13</sup> I have written extensively about the *gabinetes fonográficos* in Moreda Rodríguez, *Inventing the recording*, 64-122.

even though *zarzuela* was a genre with broad popular appeal across social classes, it is likely that the *zarzuela* cylinders were mostly consumed by individuals from the bourgeoisie and upper classes. *Gabinetes* established some synergies with live *zarzuela* – in Madrid, some *gabinetes* were located in close proximity to theatres, which likely allowed them easy access to singers and theatre-goers -, and so it is likely that a key concern at this stage was to offer listeners a product that somehow allowed them to reminisce on the live listening experience (in which the singing would have been complemented by acting, movement and dancing).<sup>14</sup> Gramophone, thanks to its more developed duplication processes and consequently lower prices, started a process of democratization in access to recorded music, but this was not completed until the invention of electrical recording and its associated social practices in the mid-1920s;<sup>15</sup> many if not most *zarzuela* listeners still enjoyed the art form primarily through live performance in the pre-electrical recording era.

### Metric rubato and small-scale tempo modifications

In recordings of this period, and especially in the very early years until the mid-1900s, the smallest forms of tempo modification (metric rubato, involving changes to note values in a passage while tempo and pulse are kept the same;<sup>16</sup> and small-scale tempo modifications, involving acceleration or deceleration for less than one bar) are ubiquitous.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, in practice, they are often difficult to tell apart, since they are often used in the same contexts.<sup>18</sup> For example, in his recording of *Marina*'s "Costas las del Levante" (1903), Florencio

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<sup>14</sup> Moreda Rodríguez, *Inventing the recording*, 130.

<sup>15</sup> Maisonneuve, "La constitution d'une culture".

<sup>16</sup> Peres da Costa, following Manuel García's singing treatise, defines metrical rubato as "the rhythmic alteration of melody notes while essentially preserving the metrical regularity of the accompaniment" (Peres da Costa, *Off the record*, 189, 195, 200 and 203; see also Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performance*, 378).

<sup>17</sup> This is the first, and most subtle, of three 'pulse modifications' discussed in Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performance*, 377.

<sup>18</sup> This is also the case in operatic performance of the period. See on Adelina Patti, Peres da Costa, *Off the record*, 244. See also Zicari, "Expressive tempo modifications", 43.

Constantino liberally changes note values, but mostly keeps the pulse steady.<sup>19</sup> By contrast, Lucrecia Arana – one of the most noted *zarzuela* performers of this time – both changed note values *and* took more liberties with tempo.<sup>20</sup>

The widespread use of metrical rubato and small-scale tempo modifications is in line with contemporary recordings in other genres – but it can also be interpreted as a strategy that allowed performers to align themselves with the expectation that performers would communicate Spanish-language text expressively (yet not necessarily intelligibly, as we will see) when singing,<sup>21</sup> which was one of the few standards of good *zarzuela* performance that was consistently and clearly articulated by critics and composers: indeed, they otherwise remained vaguer on specific elements of technique. Examples 1 and 2 show two different ways in which performers used metric rubato to optimize the relationship between text and music. In Example 1, tenor Manuel Figuerola<sup>22</sup> alters the first two pairs of semiquavers to match the rhythmic pattern found in the subsequent bars (dotted quaver + semiquaver). This gives his delivery a repetitive quality that suits the obsessive nature of the passage: Jorge, while toasting to his friends, signals that he is still tormented by his unrequited love for Marina. In Example 2, baritone Emilio Cabello alters the note values of the first instance of the rhythmic pattern so that it does not match the second. While Cabello is doing the opposite of Figuerola here, his decision too can be connected to a desire to communicate text, mirroring the agitated state of mind of the character, Simón.



<sup>19</sup> Constantino, “Costas”.

<sup>20</sup> For example Arana, “Esta es su carta”.

<sup>21</sup> Regidor Arribas, *La voz en la zarzuela*, 7-8; Casares Rodicio, “Voz”, 941.

<sup>22</sup> Figuerola did not have a particularly high-profile career, but he did record rather frequently for the *gabinetes* and also for Gramophone in their first visits to Spain.



Example 1. ‘A beber, a beber, a ahogar’ from Emilio Arrieta’s *Marina*, bars 30-34. As written (1a) and as performed by Manuel Figuerola ca. 1899-1901 (1b).<sup>23</sup> Translation of text: *Where are you fleeing to, illusions of mine?*



Example 2. ‘Monólogo’ from Ruperto Chapí’s *La tempestad*, bars 103-105. As written (2a) and as performed by Emilio Cabello ca. 1897 and 1905 (2b).<sup>24</sup> Translation: *The muted thunder resonates further away.*

As advanced above, many of these early *zarzuela* recordings do not allow listeners to make out each and every word, for at least two reasons (not mutually exclusive): firstly, the limitations of early technologies; secondly, the changes in vocal technique around these years

<sup>23</sup> Figuerola, *Brindis*, 0:39. As was the norm with *gabinete* cylinders, this was not dated; however, Puerto y Novella was active only between 1899 and 1901.

<sup>24</sup> Cabello, “Monólogo”, 0:14.



that maximized resonance sometimes at the expense of diction, originating in *verismo* singing,<sup>25</sup> but reaching into some quarters of the *zarzuela* opera as well. In this context, tempo modifications – which could be captured accurately on record, as opposed to other parameters such as vibrato, dynamics or timbre - might have been regarded as a relatively straightforward way of overcoming one or both of these issues by conveying a sense of the contour of the text, rather than its every phoneme. Such an approach, moreover, would have parallels with other singing practices of the period: John Potter has speculated that portamento in early recordings helped “give an illusion of language, re-creating the contour (as opposed to the sound) of speech in exaggerated form,”<sup>26</sup> and Leech-Wilkinson similarly suggests that portamento in early recordings was perceived as mimicking primal, instinctive, non-verbal emotional responses.<sup>27</sup> While these citations refer to portamento rather than tempo modifications,<sup>28</sup> what both authors are crucially implying here is that vocal performance practices of the period might have shared a preoccupation with recreating spoken speech in some form; as suggested by the *zarzuela* examples, recording technologies might have in some cases encouraged singers to find new ways of doing so.

While lyrical romanzas like those discussed in examples 1 and 2 were very receptive to metrical rubato and small-scale tempo modifications, recordings suggest that sung dance numbers (e.g. *guajiras*, *tangos*, *seguidillas*, etc.) were less so.<sup>29</sup> A plausible reason for this is that these numbers were often accompanied by live dancing on stage. Some recordings, however, escape this logic, such as baritone Ernesto Hervás’s 1915 recording of “Seguidillas” and “Tango” from *Marina*.<sup>30</sup> This could simply be a reflection of the relative

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<sup>25</sup> Gentili, “The changing aesthetics of vocal registration”, 66.

<sup>26</sup> Potter, ‘Beggar at the door’, 550.

<sup>27</sup> Leech-Wilkinson, ‘Portamento and musical meaning’, 248.

<sup>28</sup> Zicari writes that Patti used different types of tempo modifications “in relation to the dramatic content of each aria”, but does not develop the argument in detail; Zicari, “Expressive tempo modifications”, 51.

<sup>29</sup> Examples include Soledad’s “Guajiras” from *La revoltosa*; the “tirana” section in *El barberillo de Lavapiés*’s “Dúo tirana”. Waltzes, on the other hand, typically show a greater degree of tempo modification.

<sup>30</sup> Hervás, “Seguidillas y tango”.

variability and diversity of performance practices in *zarzuela*: indeed, we know from other recordings by Hervás that his strengths were not in the color of his voice or the solidity of his technique, but rather in his musicianship and expressivity, and so he might have felt that a more rhythmically flexible performance, both on stage and in recordings, would have suited his strengths best. But it is also possible to read it as evidence of a nascent understanding of the recorded medium as distinct from live performance: indeed, it might have been that Hervás sung *a tempo* on stage, but chose not to do so in the studio in the absence of dancers. It is also around the mid-1910s that we start to find examples of the opposite (i.e., constant tempo in numbers that would have normally accommodated flexibility),<sup>31</sup> as is the case with recordings by sopranos María Darnís<sup>32</sup> and Juana Benítez.<sup>33</sup> In their reluctance to use small-scale tempo modifications and metrical rubato, they remained the exception,<sup>34</sup> but at the same time their performances fit within the broader expressive code we recognize from contemporary recordings: Benítez, for example, uses low-larynx voice production, with abundant use of chest voice, to give her delivery a spoken quality which would be fully in line with the expectation that *zarzuela* performers should communicate text expressively. With small-scale tempo modifications becoming more toned down after the introduction of electrical recording, the question arises whether performers such as Darnís and Benítez might have prefigured future changes. On the one hand, as I will argue subsequently, changes in performance in the 1920s seem to be intrinsically linked to the introduction of electrical recording, and so it might be anachronistic to regard Darnís and Benítez as pioneers. On the

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<sup>31</sup> There are a few isolated examples in the earlier corpus of recordings (e.g. on wax cylinder Moreno, “Alegres campanas”). This might have reflected personal choice, or perhaps inexperience or caution in the studio: with cylinders and discs being of limited length, singers might have been conscious that too many liberties with tempo might have meant not being able to fit in the number in the space allocated.

<sup>32</sup> Darnís, “Gran salve”; Darnís and Cortada, “Dúo de Marina y Jorge”.

<sup>33</sup> Benítez, “Romanza de Rosa”, Cara B. Digitized discs at the Biblioteca Digital Hispánica site display side A (“cara A”) and side B (“cara B”) as separate options within the same page; in footnotes, I direct the reader to “cara A” or “cara B” as necessary. Compare with an earlier, more rhythmically flexible performance of the same romanza: Colás, “Ay de mí”.

<sup>34</sup> The most prolific or most renowned performers of the time (Luisa Vela, Emilio Sagi Barba, Hervás, Inocencio Navarro, etc.) did use small-scale modifications and metrical rubato profusely in recordings.

other hand, though, continuity mattered enormously: it was not the case that younger performers in the 1920s simply invented from scratch new ways of performing, but rather that they built up incrementally on earlier developments which were in turn variations with respect to earlier versions of the expressive code.<sup>35</sup> Performers such as Darnís and Benítez might therefore have provided the younger generations a range of expressive options that happened to work well with electrical recordings.

### Large-scale tempo modifications

While Manuel García advised against large-scale modifications (those extending for longer than one bar),<sup>36</sup> these were still used liberally in many of the earlier *zarzuela* recordings (as well as in opera). One particularly productive context to examine these large-scale modifications are the various *jota* numbers that appear in some of the repertoire works: they help us understand how traditional forms were filtered into *zarzuela*, becoming integrated with other musical idioms and, ultimately, how the hybridity of the genre was deployed on stage. Recent scholarship of *zarzuela* has indeed called attention to the genre's hybridity, integrating musical and dramatic idioms from other forms of vernacular theatre and from urban or traditional genres.<sup>37</sup> The examination of tempo modifications in *jota* numbers suggests that recordings can help us understand how the integration between traditional, vernacular and classical idioms happened not only in the composition process, but also in performance.

Readers might know the *jota* as a traditional dance in triple meter, sung and danced at a rather brisk tempo. Within Spain, it is most commonly associated with the region of Aragón,

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<sup>35</sup> Leech-Wilkinson indeed suggests that changes in performance styles operate by increment rather than through radical change: Leech-Wilkinson, "Recording and Histories of Performance Style".

<sup>36</sup> Zicari, "'Ah! Non credea mirarti' nelle fonte discografiche", 199.

<sup>37</sup> Salaün, *Les spectacles en Espagne*, 87-115; Mejías García, "Dinámicas transnacionales en el teatro musical popular".

but it exists in other regions of Spain. Throughout the nineteenth century, the *jota* was integrated into Western nationalist musical idioms as a signifier for Spanish music (e.g. Glinka's *Jota aragonesa*), and towards the late nineteenth century, it was re-appropriated by Spanish composers with similar meanings. In *zarzuela*, the *jota* can either work as a signifier for Aragón – as in Manuel Fernández Caballero's *Gigantes y cabezudos* and Ruperto Chapí's *El fonógrafo ambulante* or simply for the Spanish common people more generally, as is the case with “Jota de los ratas” in Federico Chueca's *La Gran Vía*, sung by three Madrilenian pickpockets. *Zarzuela* composers did not normally pick up existing *jotas*: instead, they composed them from scratch, aiming at integration within other *zarzuela* idioms and dramatic structure rather than for authenticity.<sup>38</sup>

Performers' approaches to these *jotas* were not dissimilar to composers': they did not seek to keep the steady tempo we hear in recordings of traditional *jotas* from this era, but rather they tried to sing them in ways that harmonized with the expressive code of the genre, which in this case involved tempo flexibility. *Jota* stanzas consist of four lines, and each of these lines is typically set to four bars of music. Within this four-bar unit, the first two bars are normally quite free rhythmically, and tempo becomes stricter and faster in the last two. This tempo pattern is consistent in recordings throughout the period under study, and it remained so even after other types of tempo modifications started to subside, even though the rate of contrast typically becomes less extreme as we move on: this is the case with Antonietta Martínez's recording of *Gigantes y cabezudos* '“Si las mujeres mandasen”' on wax cylinder for Corrons around 1900<sup>39</sup> compared with Mercedes Meló's for Gramophone in 1930.<sup>40</sup> Other practical considerations might have sometimes influenced the rate of tempo contrast, as in the above-mentioned “Jota de los ratas”, presented below in Example 3. The three *ratas* sing this

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<sup>38</sup> Encabo, *Música y nacionalismos en España*, 96-112.

<sup>39</sup> Martínez, “Si las mujeres”.

<sup>40</sup> Meló, “Si las mujeres”, Disco 2, cara B.

passage together, and this likely made it difficult to coordinate a full *rubato* in the opening two bars; instead, in comparison with recordings of solo numbers, the “Jota de los ratas” tends to feature only a slight tenuto, which remains relatively constant beyond the period under study in this section and into the electrical recording era.<sup>41</sup>



*Example 3 ‘Jota de los ratas’ from La Gran Vía, bars 88-94. Translation: In order to start a career*

Tellingly, *zarzuela* composers reflected these performance practices in their notation. In example 4, from “Si las mujeres mandasen”, composer Fernández Caballero conveys large-scale tempo modifications through the accompaniment: it is sparser in bars 30-31, 34-35, and 38, which are meant to be sung in a more rhythmically flexible way; and more rhythmically precise in bars 32-33, 36-37, and 39-40. Accents also possibly communicated to performers that these notes should be performed with some heaviness, with the shorter melismas at the end of each phrase being lighter. The ubiquity of the *jota* pattern throughout recordings of the period, as well as the extent to which it was codified in scores, suggests that such pattern was seen indeed as crucial to the performance style.

<sup>41</sup> Gil and others, “Jota de los ratas”, 1:05; Hervás and others, “Jota de los ratas”, Cara B, 1:26; López and others, “Jota de los ratas”, 1:20.



Example 4. “Si las mujeres mandasen” from Gigantes y cabezudos, bars 30-40, as written.

Translation: If women ruled the world / instead of men

*Zarzuela* performers also used tempo contrasts (i.e. different tempi for different phrases or sections in a piece, with the difference between tempi ranging between subtle to conspicuous).<sup>42</sup> Contrasts were normally used in more structurally complex romanzas, in the vein of the cavatina-cabaletta structure of Italian bel canto arias, whereas simpler *zarzuela* numbers, particularly those with greater influence from traditional or urban music, did not include much room, if any, for these types of tempo contrasts. Unlike the other types of tempo modifications, which were largely left to convention and/or the preference of the singer, tempo changes were normally indicated in the score, typically through a mixture of Italian and mostly Spanish tempo indications, many of them *ad hoc* and highly subjective. The rate of contrast between sections could vary widely between recordings of the same romanza: for example, in two of the earliest wax cylinder recordings of the well-known duet from *La revoltosa* (two unnamed singers for Pathé in 1902<sup>43</sup> and señorita Rossi and señor Moreno for La fonográfica madrileña in 1902-1905<sup>44</sup>) the second section, an *allegro animato*,

<sup>42</sup> Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performance*, 378.

<sup>43</sup> Anonymous, “Dúo de los claveles”.

<sup>44</sup> Moreno and Rossi, “Dúo de los claveles”.

is sung at a very similar speed ( $\text{♩} = 195$ ), but the Pathé singers undertook the first, slower section (*andantino sostenuto*) at  $\text{♩} = 60$ , whereas Rossi and Moreno opted for  $\text{♩} = 90$ , resulting overall in a more dramatic escalation from the yearning of the first section to the desire-fueled energy of the second. Two further cylinders recorded shortly thereafter fall somewhere in between.<sup>45</sup> In her two recordings of *Gigantes y cabezudos*'s "Luchando tercós y rudos", Blanca del Carmen kept tempo contrasts rather discrete,<sup>46</sup> whereas Ascensión Miralles, recording for Álvaro Ureña at around the same time, was more dramatic.<sup>47</sup> The same performer could similarly deploy different approaches in different recordings of the same romanza, as was the case with Lucrecia Arana in her 1905 and 1908 recordings for Gramophone of *La viejecita*'s "Canción del espejo": the former barely changes tempo, while the latter does so perceptibly, although still rather modestly compared to other recordings of similar numbers ( $\text{♩} = 35$  becomes  $\text{♩} = 40$ ). This variability might have been partly due to the climate of experimentation predominant at the time in studios. In particular, as with small-scale tempo modifications, a dramatic tempo contrast might have provided an expressive alternative to make up for the limitations of the technology in capturing dynamics and timbre.

### Electrical recording

From the mid-1920s, with the introduction of electrical recording, tempo modifications in *zarzuela* become less hyperbolic to our ears, more in line to styles we are familiar with – and, simultaneously, operatic modes of production became more generalized, and the use of portamento became less intrusive and more streamlined. The toning down of metrical rubato

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<sup>45</sup> Soler and Moreno, "Dúo de los claveles"; Gurina and Alba, "Dúo de los claveles".

<sup>46</sup> Del Carmen, "Luchando tercós y rudos".

<sup>47</sup> Miralles, "Si las mujeres". The abnormally fast tempo, as well as the extremely high pitch in Miralles's voice, suggests that the cylinder's digitization was made at too high a speed. However, my point about the rate of contrast between the two sections stands.

and small-scale tempo alterations is obvious, for example, when comparing Lucrecia Arana's recording of "Esta es su carta" (discussed above) with those by Felisa Herrero for Columbia Graphophone<sup>48</sup> and by Mercedes Meló for Gramophone<sup>49</sup>, both 1930. But remnants of the earlier approaches still survived; a later example of a performer taking a similar approach to Arana's tempo flexibility came from old-school singing actress Salud Rodríguez in her 1929 recording of "Tango de la Menegilda",<sup>50</sup> where slight speeding-ups and slowing-downs are used to great dramatic effect. Many large-scale tempo modifications became more restricted too; often, they were simply used discreetly at the end of phrases.<sup>51</sup> These developments are not contradictory with the broader global shift away from romanticized performance in the interwar period and particularly after the Second World War;<sup>52</sup> however, as we will see later, *zarzuela* performance does not completely conform to this paradigm.

One way of making sense of these shifts we hear in recordings is through recourse to Katz's "phonograph effect". The phonograph effect would help explain why tempo modifications were prevalent in earlier recordings: unlike timbre or dynamics, they could be recorded very accurately, and so they might have been overemphasized in recordings as expressive devices, and perhaps in live performance as well. But electrical recording might have re-balanced the situation: the timbres (and timbral nuances) of voices could now be captured more accurately. Dynamic gradations – such as *filados (messa di voce)* – could now be recorded more satisfactorily, achieving some of the same effects they would have likely had in live performance, i.e., capturing the attention of audiences and contributing to the overall dramatic structure of the number.<sup>53</sup> String instruments could be recorded more accurately

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<sup>48</sup> Herrero, "Esta es su carta".

<sup>49</sup> Meló, "Esta es su carta", Disco 2, Cara A.

<sup>50</sup> Rodríguez, "Tango de la Menegilda".

<sup>51</sup> For example, in the following recordings from *Luisa Fernanda*: Ottein and Vendrell, "Caballero"; Redondo, "Morena Clara"; Sagi Barba, "Por el amor".

<sup>52</sup> Leech-Wilkinson, "Portamento and musical meaning", 158.

<sup>53</sup> For example, in anonymous, "Teatro principal", *El luchador*, December 14, 1931, 3, the anonymous reviewer questions Selica Pérez Carpio's decision to sing the duet from *La revoltosa* in a piano dynamic, but concedes that she was likely trying to convey the intensity of the moment. Such advances in the recording of dynamics are



allowing singers and conductors to rely more on the original orchestrations. In this context, singers might have felt increasingly self-conscious about over-abusing tempo modifications: these could still have held appeal on stage – if in the hands of a skilled performer with good sense of timing and strong acting skills -, but the repeatability inherent in recordings would have considerably diluted its appeal there, particularly now that improved technological capability allowed other expressive elements (dynamics, timbre, etc.) to come through more clearly.

Importantly, though, changes in tempo modifications remained a matter of degree rather than of substance: indeed, compared to other Western classical styles, *zarzuela* did keep many of the older gestures – including portamento, albeit, again, in a pared-down form with respect to earlier recordings. This invites us to consider a more nuanced understanding of the phonograph effect and of linear histories of performance styles, particularly since tempo modifications did not simply survive as a fossilized relic, but were used creatively and productively by performers. The *jota* pattern, for example, was not only applied to newly composed *jotas*, but also imposed itself successfully in some of the new musical idioms the genre absorbed from the 1930s onwards, including jazz and Latin American popular musics. Example 5 comes from the tercet (an *habanera*) sung by Juan Eguía, Verdier and Simpson in Pablo Sorozábal's *La tabernera del puerto* (1936). The 2 + 2 *jota* pattern is clearly indicated by Sorozábal via a ritardando (and, in other similar contexts in the number, tenuto) followed by a tempo. With this, Sorozábal clearly inserted his stylistically innovative material within codes that would have been amply familiar to both performers and composers.

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more obvious in later recordings from the long-play era, and particularly in the extensive collection of *zarzuelas* conducted on record by Ataúlfo Argenta, who made some sixty LP recordings of individual works between 1953 and his death in 1958 at the age of forty-four.



Example 5. 'Terceto' from *La tabernera del puerto*, bars 47-50. Translation: *Those nights of drunkenness*

Similarly, small-scale tempo modifications (more so than metric rubato) were integrated into the performance practices of newly composed romanzas, and often semi-codified in the score too. Examples include Fernando's romanza in *Doña Francisquita*, Leandro's and Juan Eguía's in *La tabernera del puerto*<sup>54</sup> and Germán's in *La del soto del parral*<sup>55</sup>. All of these are introspective romanzas for male voices, often with a touch of *verismo*, intending to capture turmoil, doubt and conflict. Whereas in earlier years small-scale tempo changes and the closely associated metric rubato often mimicked patterns of speech, highlighting certain words to the detriment of others, these later recordings suggest a further level of abstraction and a more impressionistic approach in capturing the character's train of thought, rather than focusing on detail. Moreover, unlike the case with earlier romanzas, tempo modifications were often explicitly notated in the score: Juan Eguía's romanza includes a new tempo indication – and sometimes two – in practically every phrase. Importantly, such detailed tempo indications were not always scrupulously respected in recordings, not even by composers conducting their own works.<sup>56</sup> What they might have signaled instead – at a time

<sup>54</sup> Simón, "Romanza de Leandro", Disco 2, cara B.

<sup>55</sup> Redondo, "Ya mis horas felices", cara B.

<sup>56</sup> This is the case with Federico Moreno Torroba's 1950 recording of his zarzuela, *Luisa Fernanda* (Moreno Torroba, "Para comprar", 1950).

in which more *zarzuela* singers were able to read music fluently-<sup>57</sup> was a wish on the part of composers to keep tempo flexibility as an integral part of the expressive code of the genre even as it was disappearing elsewhere.

Despite the continuities I have emphasized in this section so far, one particular aspect of the genre's expressive code was experienced as more disruptive: fermatas (*calderones*). Fermatas were amply present in the earlier recording of *zarzuelas* and typically appeared on the dominant of a perfect cadence, holding the note to delay the resolution to the tonic (often for a considerable amount of time). With the introduction of electrical recording, they came to be regarded as old-fashioned, and commentary on fermatas indeed provides one of the few examples of the *zarzuela* community explicitly acknowledging that singing practices were changing during this time, in ways that show a certain degree of ambivalence towards these changes.

Tenor Emili Vendrell was widely recognized as one of the most renowned singers of the generation starting their careers in or around the 1920s. In his memoir, he branded his fermata-loving colleagues as “calderonaires” (literally, “fermateers”)<sup>58</sup> and opined that the worst offenders were the imitators of the older baritone, Emilio Sagi Barba (1876-1949), although he admitted that Sagi Barba himself did tackle the fermatas with enough bravura and distinctiveness that they worked effectively as part of his own personal style.<sup>59</sup>

Sagi Barba's 1929 recording of Germán's romanza from *La del soto del parral* (see example 6) can help us understand Vendrell's dislike for fermatas. As written, the dominant chord in the perfect cadence is already extended considerably by the vocal line jumping from C to A, then to C again, before resolving downwards. Sagi Barba's lengthy fermata prolongs the dominant even further. This might have worked well on stage, with audiences being able to

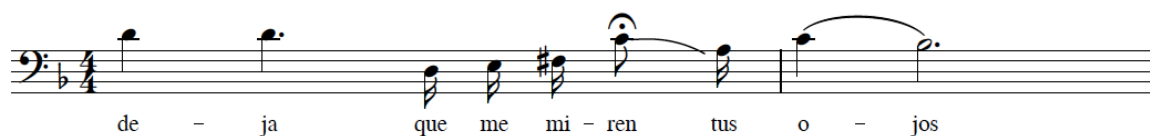
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<sup>57</sup> Vendrell, *El mestre Millet i jo*, 71; Gómez Manzanares, *Felisa Herrero*, 18-19.

<sup>58</sup> Vendrell, *El mestre Millet i jo*, 229.

<sup>59</sup> Vendrell was not the one who took issue with Sagi Barba's style; see Arlequín, “El Teatro”.

observe the physical effort required of the baritone and wondering how long for he would have been able to hold the note. But singers from younger generations, such as Vendrell, would be increasingly aware that the visual-theatrical effect would be lost in a recording, and the acoustic effect itself would have been rather diminished, and so they might have regarded long fermatas as unnecessary and redundant.<sup>60</sup>



*Example 6. “Romanza de Germán” from La del soto del parral, bars 5-6.<sup>61</sup> Translation: Let your eyes look at me*

Vendrell also named tenor Cayetano Peñalver as a prototypical old-fashioned tenor,<sup>62</sup> and Peñalver’s recordings indeed show instances that would have likely been seen as old-fashioned not long after they were recorded, as is the case with his 1927 recording of *Marina*’s “Costas las del Levante”. Here, Peñalver performs two fermatas in close succession to each other – the second one is notated in the score, whereas the first one is an addition of Peñalver’s (Example 7). As is the case with Sagi Barba’s example above, the addition of an extra fermata would have had the effect of further prolonging the sense of suspension.



<sup>60</sup> Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos quoted in anonymous, “Coloquio”, 141.

<sup>61</sup> Sagi Barba, “Romanza”, Cara B, 1:20.

<sup>62</sup> Vendrell, *El mestre Millet i jo*, 229.

*Example 7. “Costas las del Levante” from Marina, bars 29-32, as recorded by Cayetano Peñalver in 1927.*

Another singer from the same generation who disliked fermatas was baritone Marcos Redondo: in an interview in 1942 he jokingly suggested that the government should tax those who used fermatas too often.<sup>63</sup> Like Vendrell with Sagi Barba, however, Redondo was not always consistent in his dislike: in the same memoir, he admitted to occasionally using them because audiences demanded them, and explained that he tried to make them artistically interesting through the use of dynamics,<sup>64</sup> a claim which is indeed supported by Redondo’s recordings.

Vendrell’s and Redondo’s commentary on fermatas points towards a certain ambivalence towards change. On the one hand, they – together with other younger singers - were likely keen to present themselves as innovators. In doing this, of their strongest trump cards was their familiarity with the new electrical recording technology (which many of them seamlessly integrated in their careers from an early stage), and consequently their rejection of those gestures that did not work well on disc. On the other hand, these singers could not extricate themselves completely from the past: with change being continuative rather than disruptive, their success also depended on them being able to insert themselves into a tradition that could be perceived by audiences as uniquely connected to *zarzuela*. In this sense, it is likely that the relative insularity of *zarzuela* – which absorbed influences from elsewhere, but was not so capable of exerting influence back -, as well as its close connection to discourses of national identity, dictated continuity rather than disruption.

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<sup>63</sup> Redondo, *Un hombre que se va*, 247.

<sup>64</sup> Redondo, *Un hombre que se va*, 247. See also anonymous, *Marcos Redondo*, 13.

## Conclusion

In examining a rather circumscribed corpus of recordings using a variety of sources in a context-sensitive way, I hope that the present article provides a model for researchers to diachronically examine genres or repertoires that can ultimately help us nuance narratives regarding the expressive aims of tempo modification in different musics from the nineteenth century, and how these disappeared – or, as is the case here, were toned down – in the interwar period. In particular, underlying this article is the notion that individual recordings of *zarzuela* sit at the intersection of three determinants (the expressive codes and conventions of the genre; the technology; the performer), which however cannot always be reconstructed with absolute certainty; comparison of sources as well as nuance is therefore crucial.

From this article, I would like to highlight two areas which I think are relevant beyond *zarzuela* in understanding the expressive functions of these tempo changes. The first concerns the extent to which performance styles present in early recordings were governed by a desire to imitate or evoke spoken language – and to do so in ways that worked well with the then-existing technologies. This has certainly been acknowledged in the secondary literature, but not always mapped out in detail. *Zarzuela* offers a well-documented example in how tempo modifications interfaced with other elements of performance style in communicating text expressively, and how the balance between these changed as time moved on while still keeping within similar parameters and priorities.

The second of these areas concerns the embedment of performance style history with technology. *Zarzuela* opens up the possibility for us to regard widely accepted concepts – such as the “phonograph effect”, or the move towards a more objective mode of performance in the first half of the twentieth century – as a non-linear and complex process: older components of performance styles might not have been simply wiped out, but some parts of it might have survived and remained alive as part of the expressive code, albeit in ways that

reflected that recorded performance was now a key part of how most audiences and performers experienced music.

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## Recordings

**NB. Streaming link has been included only when a digitization is available. Some of the dates below do not always match those found in the streaming links; when this is the case, the date reflects further research by the author using record catalogues and sources about the dates of operation of specific companies.**

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[Moreda Rodriguez, E.](#) (2023) Expressive tempo modifications in zarzuela performance: the evidence from early recordings. *Acta Musicologica*, 95(2), pp. 131-150

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