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SOUNDSCAPE AND DAILY LIFE IN 19TH CENTURY ZACATECAS: AN APPROACH FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF POET LUIS G. LEDESMA

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INTRODUCTION

The Mexican historian Pilar Gonzalbo pointed out that extending our gaze to the domestic unit of the family helps us to “integrate patterns of behavior in the long processes of social change and this way perceive the connections between small-scale life with large structures and transformations.”¹ It is precisely to the family space where the chronicles analyzed take us, to the daily life of persons who, with their contributions, enriched society through musical art. The purpose of this article is to explore musical sociability, especially that formed by the *Orquesta típica zacatecana de señoritas* (typical orchestra of young ladies) and, through them, to approach the sound landscape of their time.

Some texts from the second half of the 19th century, particularly the letter from the Zacatecan poet Luis Gonzaga Ledesma, will help us understand what music represented in the home, the emotional ties that united the artists, the means of learning and the transmission of musical knowledge. In the letter, we will see details such as the qualities of some characters, who, among the innocent games of being “artists,” forged their destinies as musicians. Ledesma narrated his experience when he attended the rehearsal of the typical young ladies’ orchestra, thanks to which it is possible to obtain information to understand the functioning of that organization, and the difficulties faced by both its directors and the young philharmonic members.

BACKGROUND: WITH A TINY HARP

Biographers do not reach an agreement on the figure of the musician Genaro Codina, author of the famous *Marcha Zacatecas*. Some consider him an “amateur musician,” and others claim that he was a “professional” in this field. However, a text helps us understand the meaning of music in his daily life. On August 23, 1892, the Zacatecan poet and journalist Luis G. Ledesma sent a letter from Hacienda de la Presa, in his native Fresnillo, to one of his friends who lived in the Mexican capital. The writer tells various anecdotes, recalling that Genaro Codina “was a boy even though he presented himself with a tiny harp, whose body would be nine or ten inches long [...], he never had teachers; he taught himself to play the harp lyrically.”² Curiosity is one of the qualities of this young man, who managed to master a difficult melodic and harmonic instrument. With that “tiny harp” he learned the basic elements of music: melody, harmony and rhythm.

At that time, as today, there were disagreements regarding the qualification of musicians, and in various sources we can distinguish several categories: “murguistas,” “amateurs,” and “professionals.” The street musician who barely had any knowledge of playing an instrument was disparagingly called *murguista*, and there were even singers like the one who visited San Pedro Piedra Gorda every day: “Ángel Ahumada, a big blind man who lived on the other side of the river [...] and he accompanied himself with two boxes: he sat on one and the other served to accompany his songs, playing it with his hands like a piano.”³ The singer was pretending to be a pianist, although he only made percussion sounds on the box. But others did not even deserve the name of murguistas, but barely achieved the

1. Gonzalbo Aizpuru, Pilar, *Introducción a la historia de la vida cotidiana*, México, El Colegio de México, 2006, p. 239.

2. Ledesma, Luis G., *Diario del Hogar*, Ciudad de México, 3 de septiembre de 1892, p. 2.

3. Mendoza, Vicente T. y Virginia R. R. de Mendoza, *Folklore musical de San Pedro Piedra Gorda*, México, INBA/SEP, 1952, pp. 85-86.

nickname of “gut scratchers” because of the saying “he knows nothing about the violin and plays all the sounds.”⁴

Secondly, the *amateur* musician was the one who knew how to play one or more instruments for personal pleasure, some knew how to read music and even composed simple works and, as their name indicates, they played for their friends as a hobby, and in the atmosphere of social gatherings they acquired a certain recognition. Examples of such musicians abound in novels and chronicles, such as that of the Marquise Calderón de la Barca, who heard an orchestra play “music that was too cheerful for a church. There were violins, wind instruments and several amateur musicians. They played some pieces of the same style very well from ‘‘*Cheval de Bronze*,’’⁵ so she classified them as amateur musicians or singers.⁶ Thirdly, and unlike the previous ones, the musician who made this art a profession, dedicating his time exclusively to music, acquired the category of *professional* musician, and at the end of the 19th century we find him participating in orchestras or bands, or directing groups or composing, copying and arranging the repertoire.

On the other hand, to understand the teaching-learning process, it is important to pay attention to the lines of *El músico de cuerda*, in this book, the musical instrument itself was the biographer of its owner, Epifanio Calderón Arias, who accompanied him for twenty years. According to the chronicle, there were differences between musicians who knew how to read music and were classified

as those who learned “per point,” and those who learned by ear, calling them “lyrical musicians.” Calderón Arias, also known as “Pífano,” received classes for six years and did not learn per point, but decided to “faithfully imitate the postures that the master made”⁷ on his instrument. Watching and listening was how, in this case, skills were acquired. A nineteenth-century newspaper corroborates this distinction, announcing a teacher who taught how to play “the bandolon and a variety of instruments according to their true principles.”⁸ In this regard, Ledesma also spoke about his fellow players, declaring:

A brother of mine, a boy like Genaro, bought a small guitar for twelve cents; one of those toys made of *tejamanil* (wooden planks), roughly painted, with four strings of the same thickness, and four irregular blocks of wood instead of pegs. Finally, a brother of Genaro dug up from somewhere a violin shell with a winding and a false string, and made a ridiculous bow, whose strings he tied with a thread to a rough wood stick... Encouraged then, they gave in to the mania of studying relatively difficult pieces, and finally they played them with few imperfections.⁹

Harp and toy guitar, in harmonious harmony, formed a trio with the violin’s rubble. However, it was evident how hard the three boys “locked themselves in their rooms to make fun of themselves and the instruments” and, strange as it may seem, they managed to coordinate and play “several vulgar *jarabitos* in a single tone.”¹⁰ Despite the rusticity and limited possibilities of their instruments, they set themselves the challenge of playing a more

4. *El Rasca Tripas*, México City, September 11, 1881, p. 2.

5. Calderón de la Barca, Francisca Erskine Englis de: *La vida en México durante una residencia de dos años en ese país*, Porrúa, México, 2000, p. 287. She refers to the comic opera by the Frenchman M. Daniel Auber entitled *El Caballo de Bronce*, premiered in 1835 in London and in New Orleans in 1836. Accessed July 20, 2021, the Library of Congress of the USA. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/musschatz.15223.0/?sp=3&r=0.458,0.123,0.498,0.204,0>

6. Calderón de la Barca, *La vida en México...*, pp. 94, 95 y 362.

7. Frías y Soto, Hilarión, et. al., *Los mexicanos pintados por sí mismos*, México, M. Murguía y C^a, 1854, pp. 108-118.

8. *El Sol*, México City, February 14, 1830.

9. *Diario del Hogar*, México City, September 3, 1892, p. 2.

10. *Idem*.

difficult repertoire, managing, over time, to become musicians.

Jesús C. Romero's impression of the Zacatecan musicians was referred to in a conference he gave in 1946, as part of the festivities of the 400th anniversary of the founding of Zacatecas, the date on which the remains of the musicians Fernando Villalpando and Genaro Codina were exhumed to be transferred to the mausoleum of Illustrious Men on the Cerro de la Bufa. At the event, Romero dismissed the figure of Codina, classifying him as a "popular composer." He declared that the affection of the people had made his life a legend, and that while it was true that "he played various instruments empirically... and once his works were finished... he asked someone to write them down in notation."¹¹

Don Genaro Codina... was *only* an amateur composer, very fortunate in regard to the *Marcha Zacatecas*, which due to its popular character has had the merit of becoming popular throughout México, and even crossing the borders of the country, without such magnificent fortune being able to take away from its author the character of a simple amateur, since he was fundamentally a pyrotechnician; while Villalpando was a professional musician. By expressing this opinion, I do not intend to underestimate the worth of Mr. Codina, whose inspiration I recognize and applaud.¹²

Romero did not "intend to underestimate the worth of Mr. Codina," but emphasized Codina's lack of musical training, arguing that he must therefore be considered an "amateur," and was not comparable to a "professional" musician like Fernando

Villalpando. Although biographer Emilio Flores discovered that "Codina knew how to play more than 10 instruments,"¹³ he did not provide further details regarding his level of knowledge. However, we know from various references that mastery of several instruments was common among nineteenth-century musicians and, given the lack of conservatories in the interior of the country, they resorted to well-known methods, which were a good option for learning without a teacher music theory, harmony, and techniques for playing wind instruments, as well as for the bandolón,¹⁴ guitar and psaltery. Ledesma, who knew Codina, testified to his musical training, and although he considered him an artist, he did not give him the title of "professional:"

This Genaro Codina, of whom we have just spoken, is not one of those *murguistas* who pluck a deaf guitar or a counterfeit harp to earn a living; no, he is an intelligent employee who became Head of the Treasury on an interim basis; he is an artist who understands the beauty of music without exercising it as a special profession, and he tries to express it with all the feeling of which he is capable. He is like the true painter and the true poet: like them, Codina would like everyone to be able to penetrate the charming mysteries of art; and when he has believed he has found in some friend sufficient perspicacity to perceive the complicated combinations of harmony, his enthusiasm borders on delirium, and he considers himself happy.¹⁵

These categories seem confusing to us today: it seems that the main difference between the musicians was that the *professionals* were paid to play, while the *amateurs* were not. And it seems that Codina

11. Romero Jesús C., *La música en Zacatecas y los músicos Zacatecanos*, México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, UNAM, 1963, p. 38.

12. Romero, *La música...*, p. 15.

13. Rodríguez Flores, Emilio, *Compendio Histórico de Zacatecas*, México, Editorial Magisterio, SNTE, 1977, p. 566.

14. See article showing a variety of Bandolón methods: Medrano Ruiz, Sonia, (2021), "El Bandolón"...instrumento emblemático del México independiente, *Diagonal: An Ibero-American Music Review*, 6(1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.5070/D86150852>, retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/39f0q7ww>

15. *Diario del Hogar*, México City, September 3, 1892, p. 2.

didn't remain in the category of "murguista" or "amateur," but rather developed skills to interpret music and compose it, and his first works were obtained from this toy instrument. When Ledesma's letter was written, in 1892, music was still considered an occupation and not a profession. In 1866, on the initiative of the *Sociedad Filarmónica de Conciertos* (Philharmonic Concert Society), the project of creating a conservatory in México arose, which was consolidated by decree of President Juan N. Méndez on January 13, 1877,¹⁶ and thus the *National Conservatory of Music and Declamation* was established. Although there had been an attempt to establish a music conservatory in Zacatecas as early as 1843, a music chair was only established at the Instituto Literario de García (García Literary Institute) in 1869, and it was not until the late 1980s that the city had a higher-level music education institution. For this reason, without schools for training in instrumental performance, the transmission of knowledge continued to be from person to person, or in musical social settings such as bands or orchestras, choirs and church groups.

For his part, Fernando Villalpando was trained in the Music Band of the 2nd Battalion of Zacatecas, in which he began playing horn and clarinet at the age of eleven, under the tutelage of Juan Nepomuceno Rosales. Years later he rose to the position of band and orchestra director. As Ledesma pointed out, aware of the lack of spaces for the professionalization of musicians, between 1877 and 1879 Villalpando created the Propaganda Musical Association,¹⁷ for which he "managed

to gather an excellent group of teachers, who gave free classes in public schools."¹⁸ He was also a promoter of the inclusion of music theory and vocal music in elementary schools, and in secondary and higher education institutions. He also published the *Colección de Coritos para voces infantiles*¹⁹ in 1892, a teaching material consisting of thirty-seven lessons to learn various subjects to the rhythm of his melodies. The booklet contains hymns that exalt heroic figures, employing music as an auxiliary means for memorization by adding melodies to the multiplication tables. Other songs, with texts by Ledesma, such as: *Apertura de clases*, *Clausura de Clases*, *Los exámenes*, *Premio y castigo*, *Las vacaciones*, *La luna*, *La mentira y la verdad*, exalt filial love, love for the homeland, for nature, and there are even moral lessons.

Returning to Ledesma's letter, the writer pointed out another quality of Codina: leadership, since of that trio "Genaro was the director and from then on he revealed his philharmonic abilities," added that "he later studied the note himself, managing to perfect himself to the point of being able to conduct his orchestra in public."²⁰ When he explains that he studied "the note" he means that Codina learned to read music, thus transcended those games, managing to "arrange an orchestra... under the same system that maestro Curti adopted...to which he gave the name of "Típica Zacatecana,"²¹ here is a news:

16. See Díaz-Santana Garza, Luis, "Los vivos eran oídos a lo lejos entre el estruendo de las bandas militares." The Promotion of Music during the Second Mexican Empire", in *Diagonal: An Ibero-American Music Review*, 6(2), 2021.

17. About Sunday schools of Fernando Villalpando see Díaz-Santana Garza, Luis, *Tradición musical en Zacatecas (1850-1930) Una historia sociocultural*, Zacatecas, Instituto Zacatecano de Cultura, 2009.

18. *Diario del Hogar*, Ciudad de México, September 3, 1892, p. 2.

19. Villalpando, Fernando, *A la niñez, Colección de coritos para voces infantiles compuestos por Fernando Villalpando*, Zacatecas, Imprenta y Encuadernación de Enr. García y Cia., 1892.

20. *Diario del Hogar*, México City, September 3, 1892, p. 2.

21. *Idem*.

Ladies' Orchestra

We know that Mr. Genaro Godina, together with the people who make up the typical orchestra, is in charge of organizing another one for the fair sex, and that for this purpose, he already has twenty quite accomplished students, so, soon we will have the pleasure of hearing the melodies of this nice philharmonic society that will say a lot about the culture and illustration of the fair sex of Zacatecas and of that esteemed and intelligent professor and worthy collaborators.

``Crónica municipal,`` Zacatecas, February 7, 1889, p. 3

Although the foundation of the first female *orquesta típica* in the country was proclaimed, another *típica* made up of men already existed in Zacatecas, and Codina played in it. The knowledge acquired in a self-taught manner was enough for him to be able to form groups of this nature. Months later, another newspaper reported that “the excellent orchestra, which Mr. Genaro Codina directs with such success, under the name of *orquesta típica zacatecana*, was definitively organized since last June... it is the best in this genre of those that exist in this city and... we recommend it.”²²

TYPICAL ZACATECAN ORCHESTRA.

IMPORTANT NOTICE.

The undersigned having recently organized an ORCHESTRA for dancing in the style of those of México and Guadalajara, which is under constant study, has the honor of placing it at the disposal of the public, offering its services to all those persons who are kind enough to honor it with their confidence; with the understanding that for any relative arrangement, they can contact the undersigned, calle de los Gallos, casa, numero, 33. Zacatecas, June 1889, Genaro Godina.

Crónica Municipal, Zacatecas, August 8, 1889.

In the cities of México and Guadalajara there were already *orquestas típicas*, which leads us to think that it became a nationalist

22. *Crónica municipal*, Zacatecas, August 8, 1889, p. 2.

23. Medrano Ruiz, Sonia, *Las orquestas típicas en México. De la invención a la consolidación de una tradición*, México, Instituto Zacatecano de Cultura, 2021, pp. 75-80.

24. *Diario del Hogar*, México City, September 3, 1892, p. 2

25. Bloch, Marc, *Apología para la historia o el oficio de historiador*, México, FCE, 2001, p. 86.

26. *Ibid*, p. 20.

27. *Ibid*, p. 15.

trend to make music derived from the invention of these ensembles²³ created by Carlos Curti, Díaz de la Vega and Encarnación García, at the National Conservatory, from the combination of traditional instruments such as psaltery, guitars and mandolins, and the string quartet—violin, viola and cello—, adding double bass, xylophone and flute. Codina was the director of the male *típica*, and supported in some aspects the ladies' orchestra, since Ledesma himself compared the social networks that Villalpando had in the political sphere, in contrast with those “that the Caleros do not have.”²⁴ We think that Codina intended to link the brothers Primitivo and Eliseo Calero—teachers of the young ladies of the *típica*—with notorious men like Ledesma. Although we cannot corroborate this, the article presented had a positive effect, giving visibility to the *orquesta típica zacatecana de señoritas*, and probably due to this was their period playing at the Circo Orrin, as we will see later.

The above was Ledesma's preamble, before going into the subject of the orchestra's rehearsal that he witnessed. By subjecting our object of study to the coordinates of the history: “time, space and human action” that French historian Marc Bloch proposed, it is possible to resort to reconstruction procedures.²⁵ From his perspective, “time is the medium and the concrete matter of history,”²⁶ which allows us to analyze a musical sociability, in which we discover women in society and in time,²⁷ to understand their mentalities, their musical tastes, the fashions and trends in art. Let us begin with the spatial dimension, as the space that testifies “the work of a society that modifies

the land where it lives.”²⁸ Where did this organization come from? In 1877, the city of Zacatecas had 16,000 inhabitants, and by 1895 there was a population increase, caused by the expansion of the railroads, that brought the city into the industrial era, attracting settlers and facilitating the export of minerals. The physiognomy of Zacatecas was transformed, promoting Frenchification and the use of iron columns in new buildings, such as the Teatro Calderón or the *Mercado*. Ruth E. Mohrmann highlighted the changes in the uses of the rooms in private properties,²⁹ where a space for commerce or storage was generally opened on the ground floor of a house, and the upper floor was for residential use. Pilar Gonzalbo³⁰ confirmed this when she speaks of spaces such as the living room of the mansions, suitable for receiving visitors, and other private rooms for the family. The public and the intimate were clearly differentiated. The living room favored meetings, conversation and leisure. Let us see in our source what the local space was like, and how musical rehearsals took place in the brothers’ house:

Mr. Primitivo and Mr. Eliseo Calero, the first director and the second assistant director of the girls’ orchestra... The house is humble as are the owners; but the cleanliness, which is the elegance of the poor as Victor Hugo said, demonstrates the good customs of that Zacatecan family... The smallness of the living room did not provide the space that the performers must have, so as not to get in each other’s way, and such narrowness was a new reason to consider a complete fiasco as certain.³¹

The humble hall was the public space of

28. *Ibid*, p. 56.

29. Mohrmann, Ruth-E., “Everyday Culture in Early Modern Times,” *Culture and Everyday Life* (Winter, 1993), Vol. 24, No. 1, p. 81.

30. Gonzalbo Aispuru, Pilar, *Introducción a la historia de la vida cotidiana*, México, El Colegio de México, 2006, pp. 177-179.

31. *Diario del Hogar*, September 3, 1892, p. 2.

32. The dictionary mentions that Murga is a “Company of bad musicians, who at Easter, birthdays, etc., knock on the doors of well-off houses, hoping to receive some gift.” In <https://dle.rae.es/murga>

33. *Crónica municipal*, Zacatecas, August 8, 1892.

the house where the young philharmonic musicians gathered to learn their lessons and play together. Our informant also describes something of the origins of the *típica*: it was an initiative of private individuals, given that they lacked institutional support; it was formed improvised as a free instrumental music school. The Calero family home did not have a specific room for classes or adequate furniture for that purpose; the ideal would have been a large stage for the performance of their art, but due to the small size of the room, it is possible that they held several rehearsals per week, including partial sessions—by instrument sections—in order to facilitate concentration and speed up learning of the repertoire. Then came the general rehearsals, in which the entire group would play the new arrangements and works together.

Regarding the origin of the performers and their teachers, the poet clarified that he agreed to attend the rehearsal out of commitment and not so much by will, suspecting that he might “take a nap, drugged by the unpleasant noise of a murga.” As we said before, “murguista” was commonly used to describe musicians who wandered around the streets playing and singing,³² but we realized that neither Codina nor the young ladies of the *típica* were “murguistas.” The phrase in the news referring that the orchestra “which is in constant study,”³³ speaks to us of responsibility and discipline, which we confirm when the poet stated that he was pleasantly surprised when the young girls started to play:

Far from falling asleep... I felt more ready and alert than a sentinel in grave danger...

I could hardly believe my ears, I forced myself to convince myself that those young ladies... were the ones who, in a uniform, correct and unison manner, played the first and second bandolones, the psalteries and the basses. The pedal harp, the violins and cellos [sic], the flute, the viola, did not differ one bit either in time or tone with the other instruments and all of them formed a positively admirable ensemble.³⁴

Let us now look at other sources that describe the members of the *típica*: Primitivo and Eliseo Calero played “the shepherd’s harp of the lads” from their youth,³⁵ they arrived in Zacatecas from the *hacienda del Mezquite* of Fresnillo and “Mr. Villalpando made an effort to do charity work with them, bringing them from their primitive category of *atoleros* musicians³⁶ (“as they say in the ranches) to the level of artists even adequate in front of the people, they came to know something of what music really is.”³⁷ Despite being considered *músicos atoleros*, of a lower category than *murguista*, Villalpando saw outstanding qualities in them, and admitted them to the Municipal Band, where they completed their training by learning to play *jarabes* and popular songs, studying clarinet and trombone, violin, xylophone and cello.³⁸ Codina had “worthy collaborators,”³⁹ and the Calero family formed the basis of this female typical orchestra, because in addition to Primitivo and Eliseo, their sisters Jovita and Manuela played the harp and violin. Considering Codina’s artistic development, it is not strange to think that intergenerational teaching prevailed among the Caleros, and that, after the day of work at

the Mezquite estate, the afternoons of leisure were spent harmonized by the family quartet.

We found that the instrumental versatility was essential for the transmission of knowledge to the members of the *típica* of young ladies and, thanks to Ledesma, we know that most of them came from the lower class:

I had been warned that I would only hear vulgar sonatas, performed very badly, knowing, as I knew beforehand, that the amateurs belonged to the humblest social class; that they lived by their hard work; that they only studied when their domestic occupations or the performance of other people’s work left them a moment of rest; that their exercises were of little date, and finally, that their young age (the one who plays the 1st psaltery is not yet twelve years old) and their lack of stimulation and schooling were too many reasons to excuse the imperfections in which they would surely incur.⁴⁰

The prejudices that our chronicler recognizes stand out when he associates music as an element of class distinction, and assuming that the young ladies would perform some “vulgar sonatas” very poorly due to the fact that they belonged to “the most humble social class.” Nevertheless, the ensemble played the overture of “*Campanone*,”⁴¹ a work recognized as “cultured” because it comes from an Italian opera: *La prova du’n opera seria*, which was translated into Spanish and adapted as a zarzuela. In it “the clever students excelled, and by God! I think they noticed my fierce enthusiasm and tried to stun me with their skill as if they had guessed my soporific

34. *Diario del Hogar*, México City, September 3, 1892, p. 2.

35. *Diario del Hogar*, México City, February 11, 1887, p. 2.

36. It is possible that the expression “músicos atoleros” comes from “El jarabe tapatío,” which among its verses says: Come and have some atole (traditional Mexican drink), all those who are dancing, because if the atole is good, the atolera is going sour...

37. *Diario del Hogar*, México City, February 11, 1887, p. 2.

38. Medrano Ruiz, *Las orquestas típicas...*, p. 145.

39. *Crónica municipal*, Zacatecas, February 7, 1889, p. 3

40. *Diario del Hogar*, México City, September 3, 1892, p. 2.

41. *Campanone*, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/musschatz.11422.0/?sp=5&r=0.114,0.439,0.726,0.298,0>

tendencies.”⁴² As explained by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, members of the upper classes were distinguished from the “lower” classes by their musical tastes⁴³ but on this occasion, the humble girls surprised the writer by performing opera overtures, marches, waltzes and mazurkas. The upper class and the lower class speaking the same language through their *cultural capital*.

TINSEL AND GLITZ

The passage of time in everyday life is confirmed by the social changes that occur, and in this case, it is important to observe them in that Porfirian society in the process of industrialization, was more open to the incorporation of women in labor activities. Our bard gave us his opinion on women as part of the artistic field, specifically on their incursion into the art of Euterpe. By the standards of our time, none of them was professionally dedicated to music, for all of them it was a complementary activity, and they played their instruments in the moments when domestic work allowed them. Zacatecas lacked conservatories and music schools, so teaching was carried out in the private sphere, through governesses or private instructors, which implied an additional outlay for the family. But Ledesma recognized the Calero’s vocation, comparing it with the initiative of Fernando Villalpando who had created his Sunday schools to “spread among the popular masses the magnificent and profound knowledge that he possesses.”⁴⁴ It is worth noting that the *típicas* and bands functioned as music schools, offering a space for people with limited economic possibilities.

42. *Diario del Hogar*, México City, September 3, 1892, p. 2

43. Pierre Bourdieu explained that music can be used as a strategy by various social classes “to differentiate themselves from groups they consider inferior.” In: Burke, Peter, *¿Qué es la historia Cultural?*, Barcelona, Paidós, 2006, p. 78.

44. *Diario del Hogar*, México City, September 3, 1892, p. 2.

45. Medrano Ruiz, *Las orquestas típicas en México...*, pp. 195-221.

46. *Diario del Hogar*, México City, September 3, 1892, p. 2

47. *Idem*.

48. *Idem*.

In 1892, when Ledesma wrote, the music academies of the *Asociación Propaganda Musical Zacatecana* had disappeared, but the *Normales de Profesoras y Profesores*, the *Instituto Científico y Literario*, and the elementary schools, public and private, offered vocal and, in special cases, instrumental music.⁴⁵ The exams were public, “they were the delight of Zacatecan society, because the innocence and candor of the girls were combined with the freshness of their voices and the charm of their music.”⁴⁶ Other testimonies from civic and literary evenings attest to the social atmosphere in which men and women displayed their musical skills and virtuosity. Their opinion is valuable regarding a certain “indifference with which women are viewed when they are poor and artists, because we do not want to grant them the sufficiency that we grant to any elegant person, carried away, as we are, by tinsel and glitz.”⁴⁷ Ledesma is speaking here of the differences that exist between people due to their social position, not due to their gender.

Later, he highlighted the “remarkable modesty of the performers (without)... consciousness of their merit... sacrificing their short moments of rest to the study of the divine art.”⁴⁸ It is perhaps because of the above that, from his perspective, they could be considered mere *amateurs*. However, the following note published on April 9, 1893—two days after the benefit night of the Zacatecas Typical Orchestra at the Orrin Circus Theater, in addition to the imminent commitment to represent the musical art of Mexican women at the Chicago Exposition—confirms the innovation that it brought with it:

A typical ladies' orchestra is a new enterprise in México, and its success, already assured, opens a new field for Mexican women. The general uprising of women throughout México for a common object: to exhibit their work in the arts and sciences, is of far greater importance than the mere exposition of women's achievements. It indicates that women are gaining in value and strength, and that the day is near when they will be a more important and better recognized factor in the great intellectual material and spiritual work of the world.⁴⁹

It was important to promote the orchestra as a "new enterprise in México," which showed the intellectual development and potential of women. In this case, the aim was to highlight their intellectual and artistic growth, not just their material growth, evident in other exhibitions where crafts and food made by women's hands had been brought. Fortunately, the Calero Brothers did not discriminate against their students based on social status or gender: they managed to "spread among the popular masses" a model of learning music through traditional orchestras, not through bands, of which there were two very important ones in Zacatecas: the Municipal Band and the Children's Band of the Guadalupe Hospice, which were made up only of adults, young people and male children. Unlike these groups, the typical girls' group proved that women had the capacity to learn and show their skills in public, and that with few resources it was possible to make music together at a good artistic level.

WITH THE BORROWED HARP

Ledesma said that Codina and his brother played musical instruments that were more like toys. A journalist had mentioned the "shepherd's harp of the lads" evoking the Caleros' childhood, playing the instrument in the fields while they looked after a flock. For his part, Romero asserted that Codina played "the rustic and imperfect harp," describing an instrument commonly used in traditional music, and not for "concert" works. The "foot harp from Zacatecas,"⁵⁰ was promoted in American newspapers as a prototype, it was also known as the Zacatecan harp, and it is likely that it had that name because the sound box had legs, which served as a base to keep it in a vertical position, making it unnecessary to rest it on the right muster, as did the harpists of the Veracruz fandango, or the performers of the traditional mariachi of Jalisco, Colima and Michoacán. It was a diatonic instrument, that is, tuned in second intervals and, lacking pedals like those of concert harps, they required modifying their tuning to play music composed in other scales.

When describing the instruments of the typical girls' ensemble, our chronicler said that "the bandolones, violins, violas and basses are of very low quality and do not give the voices that others of more perfect construction... not even the pedal harp belongs to the group, but to the intelligent philharmonic D. Juan Curti." The typical harpist learned to play on her brothers' "pastoral harp" and with it she achieved a certain mastery, from there she moved on to the concert harp that Juan Curti lent her. Although the girls did not play the "rustic violin" with a quince stick bow or the small guitar of *tejamanil*, their instruments were not ideal, so it was necessary to acquire others of better quality. In 1893, a Texan journalist clarified that "those who have

49. *La Rosa del Tepeyac*, Zacatecas, April 9, 1893.

50. *La Prensa*, San Antonio, February 14, 1920.

heard Mexican orchestras of men, must not stop listening to these ladies, they use new instruments built for them that are not used by men.”⁵¹ In this sense to facilitate the performance of their small hands, they had instruments built with smaller size. At the time, it was common to make custom-made musical instruments, so that children and young people would not have difficulties. Let us remember the donation of instruments that the French businessman Domingo Berrouet made to the children’s hospice in Zacatecas in 1879.⁵² He wrote to Paris, to “Rousseau, Oliver and Co., [Rue Richer 26] to have them manufactured as soon as possible,”⁵³ and in his letter he instructed Ramón Ortiz to go to Veracruz for them. In three boxes he received copies of Lupot and Stradivarius violins, various string and wind instruments, as well as accessories, music stands, and methods for the institution.⁵⁴

By 1894, the Zacatecas Typical Girls’ Orchestra already had its own instruments of a certain value, so much so that they used them to cover their debt in a Sonoran hotel during one of their concert tours, as can be seen in the following review:

Unlawful Seizure.- A Hermosillo newspaper dated the 28th says: To pay the hotel expenses owed to him by the young ladies of the Zacatecana typical orchestra, Mr. Miguel Gohen showed up yesterday at the home of those artists and asked them to hand over all their instruments. Mr. Berrueco, representative of the company, intends to formally claim this act.⁵⁵

The inadequate organization of their tour led to financial failure on that last trip. Mr. Berrueco could do nothing to help the young instrumentalists, but on November 13, the society of Zacatecas came to their aid: “Eduardo Sandoval, along with several of my friends and colleagues, have decided to give a bullfight to dedicate their net proceeds to the Company of Ladies and Young Ladies who make up the *orquesta típica*, who are far from their homeland and cannot return due to lack of resources.”⁵⁶ Consequently, they requested the political leader to exempt the license fees to carry out the said bullfight, and to send money to the girls “unconsciously expatriated.”⁵⁷ We do not know if their instruments were returned to them, nor do we know how they returned to Zacatecas.

SPONSORS AND PATRONS

Experience shows that many artists have turned to patronage to support themselves. We find the sponsorship of these initiatives in our chronicle, since Codina had created the orchestra “supplying it with instruments at his own expense in part and supplying it with pieces that he ordered from México.”⁵⁸ The works published by the world’s leading music houses were arranged for the group, and constituted part of that benefit, thus forming the first repertoire of the male group to compete with the *típicas* of Guadalajara and México City.

On the other hand, we know that the last decade of the 19th century was its most prolific

51. *The Evening News*, Waco, August 25, 1893.

52. Letter from Domingo Berrouet addressed to Ramón C. Ortiz, February 16, 1879, published in the newspaper *El Defensor de la Constitución*, Zacatecas, May 6, 1879, pp. 3 and 4. Collection: Special collections/Collection: Official newspaper/Section: Official newspaper of the Government of the State of Zacatecas/ *El Defensor de la Constitución* (1877-1889)

53. *Diario del Hogar*, México City, February 26, 1893, p. 3.

54. Medrano Ruiz, Sonia, “From France to Zacatecas...the great gift that transformed the history of the Children’s Hospice,” *El Artista* 18, 2021, <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/874/87466606012/>

55. *El Tiempo*, México City, October 6, 1894.

56. AHEZ, Political Headquarters Fund, Series, General correspondence, Sb. Public entertainment, Box 1, file.107.

57. *The same item*.

58. *Diario del Hogar*, México City, September 3, 1892, p. 2

artistic period, publishing original works, whose scores had international distribution, as stated in the newspapers, among them: *Mazurka* (1886);⁵⁹ *Marcha Zacatecas* (1893);⁶⁰ schottisch *El sueño de la inocencia* (1893);⁶¹ *Himno a la Ciencia*, (1894);⁶² dance for singing *Luz de mis ojos*, mazurka *La Canastilla de Boda* and *Marcha Inauguración* (1898).⁶³ The variety of repertoire that the young ladies offered to Ledesma in the private concert, where they combined European repertoire with three of their dedicated compositions and arrangements for that instrumental ensemble, can be seen in the following concert program:

- | | |
|--|-----------------|
| I. "Zacatecas", Military march dedicated to General. Jesús Aréchiga. | - G. Codina |
| II. "Joy", wals | - E. Waldtenfel |
| III. "Campanone" | - Mazza |
| IV. "Pleasant illusion", mazurka | - G. Codina |
| V. "Raymond" overture | - Tomas |
| VI. "The typical Zacatecan polka | - G. Codina |

Another columnist mentioned the originality of the orchestra: "a nice group... with a repertoire of entirely new works and unknown in this capital."⁶⁴ Some pieces match scores we found in private archives in Zacatecas. These are papers with melodic and harmonic lines known by musicians as *particellas*, individual scores for each instrument, and which were surely part of the repertoire since, unlike other similar orchestras in the country, the Zacatecan ones played music created for them. Ledesma revealed the support that Juan Curti gave to the young ladies by lending them his concert harp, commenting that "he provided it with absolute benevolence, in view of the progress he found in the amateurs."⁶⁵ The girls' work

59. *La Patria ilustrada*, México City, April 5, 1886, p. 3.

60. *La Patria*, México City, April 21, 1893, p. 3.

61. *La Patria*, México City, May 24, 1893, p. 2.

62. *La Patria*, México City, April 26, 1894, p. 3.

63. *Mundo Ilustrado*, México City, November 13, 1898.

64. *Diario del Hogar*, México City, February 26, 1893, p. 3.

65. *Diario del Hogar*, México City, September 3, 1892, p. 2

66. *Idem*.

and discipline earned them the support of the Italian musician, and it is possible that they were linked to his brother Carlos Curti, who at that time worked in the Orrin circus orchestra in México City. *Social networks* gave the *típica* a boost.

Regarding the contributions of Primitivo and Eliseo Calero, we mentioned that the living room of their house served as a school and rehearsal room, but the most important thing was the time they dedicated to selecting, based on their qualities, the "young women most suited to music, eagerly spying on their inclinations towards art, correcting their defects with sweetness, battling with the diversity of characters, and finally fulfilling their noble mission with the longing and kindness that only parents acquire."⁶⁶ If we read these last words carefully, they highlight the challenges that every teacher must face, in addition to the purely musical work: he must deal with problems such as absences, lack of study, quarrels among teenagers, rivalries, jealousy and gossip that could arise between them and their families. This is why he spoke of attributes such as understanding and patience, comparable to those of parents.

A completely different intervention was that of the governor of Zacatecas, who like many Mexican rulers of yesterday and today uses public resources to present himself as benefactors, as seen in the following report: "The state government... will protect the group formed by the Calero brothers and many people affirm that this sponsorship will be a fact, known as the illustration of General Aréchiga, who began by giving clothes and shoes to each of the girls, and will conclude

by favoring them more widely by improving the instruments.”⁶⁷ And, indeed, two days after the debut at the Orrin circus, the press detailed the effect that the attires caused, as they used “the picturesque costume of the Mexican china woman composed of a shirt with lace, a sequined *castor*, white silk *choclo* and a green silk *rebozo* as well.”⁶⁸ Music performed on stage by an all-female orchestra was something unusual, and it earned the applause of the capital’s audience. The same thing happened abroad, and the report of one of their performances in Texas reveals the astonishment that their image—and sounds—produced: “We have not heard the typical Mexican ladies’ orchestra that has gained prestige in the press, they will have an attractive performance tonight. 16 beautiful young ladies who produce sweet and voluptuous Mexican music, dressed in picturesque costumes from their native country.”⁶⁹ Just as Carlos Curti’s orchestra had done a few years earlier, part of the program and costumes were linked to Mexicanness, but did not leave cosmopolitanism aside, as they also played works by European composers.

CONCLUSION

When Ledesma arrived at the rehearsal, thinking he would hear “vulgar sonatas,” maybe he had trouble finding the chair furthest from the girls in that small room. What was the soundscape he heard before the rehearsal began? Knowing of the poet’s presence, most of the girls felt a commitment to play perfectly, so the violinist studied the most difficult passage of the works they would perform, the bandolonist repeated very fast scales to impress the visitor, and the psaltery player gently strummed her instrument trying to imitate divine harps. However, being minors, there would also be the girls who

67. *Idem*.

68. *Diario del Hogar*, Ciudad de México, 28 de febrero de 1893, p. 3.

69. *The Evening News*, Friday, Waco Texas, August 25, 1893.

talked and laughed, and in that corner one of the Calero brothers consoled a child who was crying because she had not been able to practice the previous afternoon. Finally, the director gives the instructions to the girls to tune their instrument, which leads to a cacophony of timbres and notes that insult the poet’s ear. But when the baton is raised, an astonishing silence is produced, which is the prelude to the consonances and “complicated combinations of harmony” produced by that “positively admirable ensemble,” which leave Ledesma delighted and delirious. Without the great auditory pollution of our time, we can imagine the *resonant presences* in the Calero neighborhood: the *Marcha Zacatecas* that the orchestra played that afternoon was mixed with the sonorous hooves of the horses and the creaking of the carriages, the songs of numerous birds in the park, the church bells, the laughs of the children playing, the distant whistle of the train, and the Gregorian-style vocalizations of the street vendor selling biscuits.

Such was the soundscape that his enthusiastic letter to his friend generated. Through literature we have seen the importance of musical art in the daily life of nineteenth-century Zacatecas society. While it is true that the educational system provided music theory and choral music, there were citizen initiatives aimed at the population that did not have access to the practical exercise of music. We found two tireless promoters of musical diffusion: Fernando Villalpando and Genaro Codina. Later, the Calero brothers joined in, who, due to the lack of schools, opened spaces from which new *musical sociabilities* emerged, such as bands and *orquestas típicas*, which served as schools for the less favored social class. In addition, we discovered patrons and benefactors: Domingo Berrouet,

the brothers Carlos and Juan Curti, Ramón Ortiz and Governor Jesús Aréchiga, who supported with instruments and costumes, in addition to the links and social networks for the development and dissemination of these groups to other regions. Discipline, commitment and leadership are qualities that we find in Codina and Villalpando, who promoted Euterpe's art, creating original works and making arrangements for the groups they directed. Some researchers claim that the "patriarchy" assigned "maternal" roles to women to prevent their personal and professional development, but in this case we confirm that these statements are a myth: here there was no discrimination, and no limitations, for the incorporation of young women into the musical field, even if they came from the lower classes, as shown by the creation and trajectory of the *Orquesta típica zacatecana de señoritas*, which transcended local and national borders.

Through this article, we seek to understand "the experiences and patterns of the past linked to cultural values and the consistent attitudes and choices of people from different periods,"⁷⁰ following living characters in their everyday environment within the family, in recreational and educational spaces, which broadens our view to understand their social relationships and, above all, the importance of music in everyday life. Mohrmann said that "the main sign of everyday life is the repetition of human events, and that frees people from having to constantly make decisions for or against something... creativity in particular areas is what modifies monotony and makes life worth living."⁷¹ That is to say: on the one

70. Gonzalbo Aizpuru, *Introduction...*, p. 239.

71. Mohrmann, *Everyday Culture...*, p. 76.

hand, it is easier for the general population to follow the inertia of past generations, reproducing inherited canons, but it is the individual initiatives of independent characters that bring about changes. The decisions of individuals such as Villalpando, Codina and the Calero brothers, provoked a virtuous circle, which transformed the exercise of musical art in Zacatecas, providing the rudiments for the execution of musical instruments to a group of young people, who later acquired experiences that opened their expectations to a new work universe. On the other hand, the musical creativity they developed radically modified their lives, those of their listeners and their students—since at least all of them were music teachers for their own children—, ending the monotony of daily life, and giving meaning to their existences.

As if that were not enough, and thanks to the acquired musical culture, the members of the group managed to transcend their marginal condition, since their public performances earned them the recognition and approval of the middle and upper classes. Finally, we must emphasize that even the most innocent anecdotes, such as those of the Zacatecan poet Luis G. Ledesma and his contemporaries, can help us reconstruct a fundamental part of the soundscape in the daily life of the various regions that make up the country. This soundscape is the voice of society and the times, a voice that has been rarely heard by historians, who sometimes forget that harmonic sounds are not entirely naive: they generate reality, contributing to the identity construction of society.

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