

**M. Carmen García Mallo**

**THE RECEPTION OF GERMAN PIANO MUSIC  
IN SPANISH BOURGEOIS SALONS DURING  
THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

During the nineteenth century and, more specifically, during the second half, Spain experienced a process of economic development which favored, among other aspects, an increase in various activities related to music – the appearance of different kinds of music associations, the foundation of theaters, the development of the music press, etc. Included in these social trends is the »bourgeois salon«, where the upper classes and the flourishing bourgeoisie, imitating the habits of the aristocracy, met to entertain and enjoy themselves, turning music into one of their favourite intellectual hobbies. Some of these music salons, which resembled in part a concert hall and in part a private household salon, played an important role in the introduction of foreign repertoires in Spain, as they were host to compositions from almost the entire world. One of those salons was organized in the house of the composer, pianist and music lover *Anselmo González del Valle y González Carvajal* (\*1852-1911) (*vid figs. 1-3*), which could draw on the resources of one of the most significant private music libraries in Spain at that time. In particular, we will focus on the German repertoire, which happens to be – together with the French and the Italian – one of the largest collections in this library.

Even though the use of music as a bourgeois entertainment for the upper classes was not an innovation in nineteenth-century Spain, it is true that this recreational dimension of music received a new impetus from the 1830's onwards. Music salons at

that time were slow to reach their peak in most European countries<sup>1</sup> as a consequence of the political instability that also characterized the history of Spain since the beginning of the century. During the first thirty years of the nineteenth century Spain went through a war of independence fighting against Napoleonic occupation, the establishment of a democratic Constitution (1812), and the restoration of the absolute monarchy with Fernando VII (1830) as king. His death in 1833, and the triumph of liberal ideas at that time created a favorable climate for the development of the arts, strongly influenced by France and characterized by the desire for progress and innovation, and a greater demand for consumer goods. In terms of music, this new situation resulted in the foundation of theaters, the emergence of arts publications, and the foundation of a large number of so-called »arts and music« societies, which in fact covered a broad range of artistic interests.<sup>2</sup>

Among these activities a highlight was the organization, by private enterprise, of music salons,<sup>3</sup> where the middle and upper classes met to enjoy concerts, dance sessions, exhibitions, literary and political debates, poetry readings, and also to perform short passages from dramas, comedies and »zarzuelas«.<sup>4</sup> Musical and theatrical activities were led by some of the amateurs members who attended the salons, or by a professional artist or group of artists specially invited for this purpose.

The piano became the most popular instrument in the bourgeois salons, since it could be used as a solo instrument, as a substitute for a whole orchestra, or could accompany the singing voice, as was the requirement of a large part of the repertoires at that time. With the support of the middle classes piano production underwent a significant expansion. These upper-middle classes were the force behind the increase in piano production and the main purchasers of pianos at the same time. Having a

---

<sup>1</sup> *Vid.* Among other titles: Blaze de Bury 1861; Chimènes 1993; Weber 2004.

<sup>2</sup> About the emergence of political and arts associations *vid.*: Villacorta Baños 1993: 27-30; Lécuyer 1994.

<sup>3</sup> On Spanish music salons and their evolution during the nineteenth century *vid.*: Alonso González 1993; Virgili 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Concerning the habits and mentality of the bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century *vid.*: Villacorta Baños 1993.

piano was considered to be a sign of prosperity, and to own one was an aspiration for many who wanted to take on the habits and tastes of the upper classes. At the same time, this situation also favored the formation of a repertoire characterized by its simplicity and triviality, with catchy melodies and simple harmonies and structures, since its main purpose was to entertain, and to this end the music was supposed to be easy to play, and readily accepted and memorized.

So, although the general impression about the nineteenth-century music salon in Spain is that it was a place for social gatherings, where music was just an excuse for entertainment or social interaction, we should point out that there was also a different kind of music salon, organized by semi-professional and professional musicians, where the main purpose was not only to meet but also, above all, to play music. The repertoire played there was less conventional and more avant garde, including the performance of contemporary works by composers from all over Europe, and also some chamber music pieces. Chamber music was played less often in most salons, as much because of the expense involved as because there was no tradition for this repertoire in Spain.

Many of these artistic gatherings took place in the houses of industrialists and businessmen from the most important cities in northern Spain. The owner of the salon that I will talk about here, Anselmo González del Valle, was not the only case. Also the composers Fermín María Álvarez and Marcial del Adalid both ran their own musical salons in Madrid<sup>5</sup> and La Coruña respectively and so did the musicologist Felip Pedrell<sup>6</sup>, who led a similar project in Barcelona, to name just a few examples.

---

<sup>5</sup> Fermín María Álvarez (\*Zaragoza, 1833; †Barcelona, 1898) organized in his residence in Madrid gatherings and musical evenings which were famous in the aristocracy and upper-middle classes of Madrid in the 1860s and 1870s. Not only composers (as Miguel Marqués, José Inzenga, Emilio Serrano...) and performers of music (V. Mirecki, J. Tragó, D. Zabalza...) attended these musical gatherings, but also important figures from the world of literature, poetry and art (Manuel del Palacio, Eusebio Blasco, Madrazo...), music publishers (A. Romero, Santesteban...), etc. *Vid.*: Alonso González 1992.

<sup>6</sup> It should be remembered that the musicologist and composer Felip Pedrell (\*Tortosa, 1841; †Barcelona, 1922) was a pioneer of musical nationalism in Spain -followed by his disciples Albéniz, Granados and Falla

The first type of music salons previously mentioned (those with an essentially social profile) were harshly attacked at the time by several critics, who had more ambitious musical aspirations and saw them as an obstacle for the development of a more impressive repertoire. These detractors – including Felip Pedrell himself – disapproved of the extreme simplicity that characterized most of the repertoire being played, the excessive influence of Italian and French repertoire, the audacity of some of the amateurs who performed pieces that were beyond their capabilities, and the habit then in fashion of dressing in traditional Spanish clothes to sing Spanish songs and also, for opera singers, using scenery on stage for the performance of arias and excerpts from operas. These salons were the main stage for young ladies of marriageable age, who had to know how to sing or play the piano as an important part of their education. Many composers in the nineteenth century wrote innumerable pieces dedicated to these young ladies – usually their own protégés – who used to play them during musical evenings to entertain guests, at the same time providing publicity for their teachers.

In general terms, the repertoire played in the second half of the nineteenth century in the Spanish salons can be divided into three main groups: operatic arrangements for voice and piano, piano pieces for two and four hands, and Spanish folk songs for voice and piano.<sup>7</sup>

Operatic arrangements for voice and piano were mostly taken from Italian and French operas, then in fashion all over Europe. In addition to the transcriptions where the vocal parts were retained and the orchestral part was adapted for the piano, there were also written a large number of compositions for piano

---

as composers, and Higiní Anglès as musicologist. F. Pedrell fought for the establishment of a Spanish opera style (*Por nuestra música*, 1891), published the complete works of the Renaissance composer, Tomás Luis de Victoria, in Leipzig and made the catalogue of the Musical Section of the *Biblioteca de la Diputación de Barcelona* (now *Biblioteca de Catalunya*), among many other activities. Likewise we should point out that he was a firm advocate of Wagner's music, whose operas were performed in the *Teatre del Liceu* in Barcelona, shortly after they had first been first presented in Bayreuth.

<sup>7</sup> With regard to the repertoire for voice and piano in the nineteenth century, *vid.*: Alonso González 1998. We also find examples of these pieces in: García Mallo 2002.

solo inspired by the opera repertoire, such as fantasies, rhapsodies and airs (vid. figs. 4 and 5).

Piano works were affected by a strong tendency towards virtuosity. Besides the aforementioned compositions derived from opera there were also little romantic forms, such as ballads, intermezzi, nocturnes, preludes, berceuses, etc., dance music pieces which included polkas, mazurkas, waltzes, rigaudons, gallops, etc., and also potpourris of pieces based on popular or traditional melodies.

Spanish songs for voice and piano included a wide range of Andalusian pieces, such as sevillanas, peteneras, polos, malagueñas, etc., but also jotas from Aragon, Catalan sardanas, and regional songs from all over the country.

Finally, we should include chamber music and dramatic works – excerpts from musical comedies, zarzuelas and Italian operas – which were performed mostly on special occasions, basically because of the high costs involved.

As mentioned before, one of the most distinguished salons in the Spanish bourgeoisie in the second half of the nineteenth century belonged to the composer, pianist and music lover Anselmo González del Valle.<sup>8</sup>

He was born in the then Spanish city of Havana in 1852, son of an influential businessman from the region of Asturias and a Cuban lady from a wealthy family. He started his musical education as a child under the guidance of his uncle, Manuel Francisco González.

His flair for playing the piano soon became evident, even surprising Louis Moreau Gottschalk himself, who showed interest in the young musician during a trip that González del Valle and his father made to the United States of America.

As a result of the separation of his parents when González del Valle was seven, he and his brother were sent to Oviedo, under the tutelage of a distinguished priest and friend of the family.

In Spain both brothers completed high school and graduated in law. In their student days they organized an artists gathering at their own residence, where they invited some of their classmates who later on became outstanding personalities in the culture of Asturias. At these artists gatherings, the students read

---

<sup>8</sup> *Vid.*: Suárez Fernández 1955; Uría Líbano 1997.

and discussed articles about history, literature and poetry, as well as playing music.

González del Valle continued his studies in music in Oviedo and also travelled to Paris in order to improve his education in piano, harmony and composition. There he met Carlos Beck and Rimsky-Korsakov.

During those trips to Europe and America (vid. figs. 6 and 7) he acquired a large number of musical scores, mainly for piano or voice and piano, produced by the most important publishing houses of his time.<sup>9</sup> With those scores, as well as the ones he bought in his homeland, he gradually formed one of the largest private libraries in the country at that time.<sup>10</sup> This significant collection also helped him to achieve, by teaching himself, a great command of piano technique and a broad knowledge of different styles, musical works and composers.

González del Valle's library comprises a total of about 7.500 mostly printed musical scores, a collection so significant that even a music dealer from Basel, from whom he used to buy, considered him to be a wholesaler and did not believe he was a private buyer.<sup>11</sup>

So, in his early youth González del Valle showed himself to be an exceptional pianist not only in various national circles but also in several European cities where he performed. Various accounts of his time reported that he had a great skill for sight-reading. In fact, it seems clear from the notes he wrote on the covers of the scores in his library – which include the performance date, the names of the musicians who took part in it and some personal appraisals of them – that he not only collected

---

<sup>9</sup> Regarding exchange processes between some Spanish musical publishers of the period and their German colleagues, *vid.*: García Mallo 2005.

<sup>10</sup> This music library is the topic of my doctoral thesis, which is directed by Dr. Antonio Ezquerro Esteban (Departamento de Musicología -Institució »Milà i Fontanals«, CSIC, Barcelona), and carried out thanks to a grant given by the *Departament d'Universitats, Recerca i Societat de la Informació* of the *Generalitat de Catalunya*. Concerning another Spanish private collection of the same period, *vid.*: Ros-Fàbregas 1997.

<sup>11</sup> It is probable that this music dealer was the then head of the branch of the Swiss firm *Gebrüder Hug* in Basel, as we find a considerable number of scores in González del Valle's library that carry the stamp »Gebrüder Hug/Basel« on their covers.

and compiled the scores he bought, but also used to play them at the private gatherings held in his salon.

At the age of twenty-two González > del Valle got married and restricted his concert activities to his family and circle of friends. In fact, his wife had been one of his classmates during the time he studied music in Oviedo, and some of their children also played musical instruments – the oldest even wrote some piano compositions. Although it is not stated in the scores – probably he just noted the performances given as private concerts – it is most likely that the family played music together.

His trips away were limited to short stays in Madrid and he focussed his efforts on his activity as a composer. However, during those visits to Madrid he had the opportunity to get to know many outstanding personalities in the music of his time, such as the zarzuela composer and musicologist Francisco Asenjo Barbieri<sup>12</sup>, the aforementioned musicologist and composer Felip Pedrell, and the music publisher Antonio Romero<sup>13</sup>.

During the 1890's, and despite the small but select sphere in which he developed his musical activity, González del Valle achieved a high reputation as a pianist, composer, intellectual, and art and music collector. In addition, his mother's death in 1881 – his father had died in 1876 – provided him with a considerable fortune, which placed him among the richest and most influential men in Asturias. As has already been stated, he pro-

---

<sup>12</sup> The composer, musicologist, critic and conductor Francisco Asenjo Barbieri (\*Madrid, 1823; †Madrid, 1894) was one of the most important figures of his time in the sphere of Spanish music. F. A. Barbieri carried out a thorough reform in Spanish lyrical theater, made several studies on Spanish music history, restored and promoted musical activity and the organization of concerts in Madrid and, among many other activities, he protected Spanish music from the Italian influences of the period. In his activity as a musicologist, we should mention the edition, in 1890, of the famous *Cancionero Musical de Palacio*.

<sup>13</sup> In addition to his activity as a clarinetist, publisher and music dealer, Antonio Romero y Andía (\*Madrid, 1815; †Madrid, 1885) made important contributions to the improvement of the clarinet mechanism. His models of clarinets were awarded medals in national and international exhibitions (Paris, 1867 and 1878; Vienna and Philadelphia, 1878). A. Romero also opened a popular concert hall in the same building as his publishing business, where the young Isaac Albéniz performed various recitals. Some first editions of Albéniz's works were also produced by this same publisher.

gressively increased his musical library until the end of his life, and he also acquired a valuable piano collection that included Pleyel and Steinway models.

Among the regular guests at his salon were pianists, violinists and composers who, although they were not internationally known, provided a select atmosphere to the musical evenings celebrated there.

Particularly interesting amongst the material in González del Valle's library, mostly comprised of printed music editions, is that pertaining to the German repertoire, not only in terms of the quantity of scores – almost two thousand in a collection of 7.500 scores – but also in terms of the variety of musical genres and styles represented. It includes works by nearly 150 composers from Samuel Scheidt, among the earliest ones, to Max Reger among the most recent (vid. fig. 8).

It is significant that, in addition to those names of international prestige, such as various members of the Bach family, Beethoven, Brahms, Cramer, Gluck, Händel, Kalkbrenner, Mendelssohn, Offenbach, Richter, Schubert, Schumann, Spohr, Strauss and Wagner, we find other names that nowadays are not so well-known out from the specifically German-speaking sphere, such as Berth, Klauwell, Muffat, Rolle and Winter, among others.

As mentioned, the earliest compositions in this German section of the library are a group of pieces (three fantasies, three toccatas and four variations) for organ by Samuel Scheidt and J. P. Sweelinck (vid. fig. 9), followed by another group of organ compositions written by Buxtehude and published by Philip Spitta (vid. fig. 10).

Of the rest of the group of composers that were born before Beethoven (comprising only six per cent of the compositions in the German repertoire), those representing the greatest number of works are J.S Bach, Händel, and Peter von Winter.

Regarding the rest of the scores, we should consider that González del Valle acquired most of the scores in his library before 1901, when his wife's death plunged him into a deep depression, followed by various health problems from which he did not recover. So, it is not surprising that most of the scores belonging to the German repertoire in his library correspond to different periods of the Romantic era. Instead of giving a detailed list of names, which in any case is not my present intention in

this contribution, I will focus only on composers with the greatest number of musical scores in the German section of the library who were, in chronological order of their date of birth: L. van Beethoven, J. B. Cramer, F. Ries, L. Spohr, F. W. M. Kalkbrenner, K. M. von Weber, G. Meyerbeer, H. A. Marschner, F. P. Schubert, K. G. Reissiger, F. Lachner, F. Mendelssohn, F. David, R. Schumann, W. R. Wagner, A. von Henselt, Th. Kullak, J. J. Raff, Th. Kirchner, C. H. C. Reinecke, W. Bargiel, H. G. von Bülow, S. Jadassohn, J. Brahms, A. Jensen, J. G. von Rheinberger, F. Gernsheim, H. K. Hofmann, Ph. Scharwenka, F. X. Scharwenka, P. Klengel, J. Klengel, E. d'Albert and M. Reger.

Furthermore, since most scores in González del Valle's library were bought for the purpose of being played in private performances, we can observe that most of them are for two-hand and four-hand piano, followed by compositions for voice and piano and, to a lesser extent, chamber music groups and orchestra (vid. fig. 11).

The presence of the repertoire arranged for one or two pianos is quite significant since González del Valle lived in a city which, although musical activities there were enjoying a brilliant era with the foundation of theaters, musical associations and the arts press, probably could not offer him as great a variety of symphonic and operatic repertoires as he could become familiar with due to his acquisition of scores reduced for piano (vid. figs. 12-14). In this respect, for example, the collection of Wagner's works stand out, including his complete tetralogy reduced and arranged for two-hand and four-hand piano (edited by B. Schott's Söhne).

In conclusion, we can appreciate that the repertoire in the bourgeois salons during the second half of the nineteenth century was not always as simple and superficial as it is sometimes assumed. In spite of the stereotyped image that Spain sometimes has as an outlying and even »exotic« country anchored to its own folklore, where it might appear that there is no room for the repertoire of the rest of Europe, we now observe that there were also circles interested in the music produced all over Europe. González del Valle's library is, as we have seen, a good testimony and example of that attitude. Its repertoire shows that the audiences at the musical evenings in his salon were not

satisfied with an easy repertoire characterized by triviality and superficiality, but in fact preferred works more Central European in style which were more musically demanding. Thus these music salons collaborated as much in the introduction of a European repertoire in Spain as in directing it to Latin America where, despite the loss of the last colonies in 1898 (Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines), Spain still had a great cultural influence.<sup>14</sup>

## Bibliography

- ALONSO GONZÁLEZ, Celsa (1992): «Las melodías de Álvarez: un capítulo importante en la melodía de cámara del romanticismo español». *Revista de Musicología*, XV/1, pp. 231-279.
- ALONSO GONZÁLEZ, Celsa (1993): «Los salones: un espacio musical para la España del XIX». *Anuario Musical*, 48, pp. 165-206.
- ALONSO GONZÁLEZ, Celsa (1998): «La Canción Lírica Española en el siglo XIX». *Música Hispana, Textos, Estudios*, n. 1, Madrid: Ediciones del ICCMU (Instituto Complutense de Ciencias Musicales), pp. 455-484. (corresponding to chapter XIV: La canción burguesa)
- BLAZE DE BURY, Ange Henry (1861): *Les Salons de Vienne et de Berlin*. Paris : Calmann Lévy.
- CHIMENES, Myriam (1993): «Le salon des Girette. Un modèle exemplaire de collaboration entre musiciens amateurs et professionnels à Paris vers 1900». *Revista de Musicología*, XVI/6, pp. 3692-3704
- GARCÍA MALLO, M. Carmen (2002): «La edición musical en Barcelona (1847-1915)». *Boletín de la Asociación Española de Documentación Musical*, IX/1, pp. 7-154.
- GARCIA MALLO, M. Carmen (2005): «Peters y España: edición musical y relaciones comerciales entre 1868 y 1892». *Anuario Musical*, 60, in print.
- LECUYER, Marie-Claude (1994): «Musique et sociabilité bourgeoise en Espagne au milieu du XIXe siècle». *Bulletin d'Histoire Contemporaine de l'Espagne*, 20, pp. 48-56.
- PEÑÍN, José (2000): *Música Iberoamericana de Salón*. Actas del Congreso Iberoamericano de Musicología de 1998. 2 vols. Caracas: Fundación Vicente Emilio Sojo.
- ROS-FÁBREGAS, Emilio (1997): «La Biblioteca Musical de Federico de Olmeda (1865-1909) en la »Hispanic Society of América« de Nueva York». *Revista de Musicología*, Madrid, XX, pp. 553-570.
- SUAREZ FERNANDEZ, Constantino (1955): *Escritores y artistas asturianos*. Oviedo: IDEA (Instituto de Estudios Asturianos).
- URÍA LIBANO, Fidela (1997): *Música Asturiana entre 1860 y 1934*. Vida, obra y catálogo de Víctor Sáenz, Anselmo González del Valle y Baldomero

---

<sup>14</sup> For reference to music salons in Latin America, *vid.*: Wörner 1943; Peñín 2000.

- Fernández. [Asturias:] Servicio de Publicaciones del Principado de Asturias.
- VILLACORTA BAÑOS, Francisco (1993): *Culturas y mentalidades en el siglo XIX*. Madrid: Editorial Síntesis.
- VIRGILI, María Antonia (2000): »El pensamiento musical y la estética de Salón en la España del siglo XIX«. In: *Música Iberoamericana de Salón, Actas del Congreso Iberoamericano de Musicología de 1998*, Caracas: Fundación Vicente Emilio Sojo, Vol. 1, pp. 11-40.
- WEBER, William (2004): *Music and the Middle Class. The Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris and Vienna between 1830 and 1848*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- WÖRNER, Karl (1943): »La música de salón, de café y de divertimento«. In: *Enciclopedia de la Música*. (Traducción y adaptación españolas de O. Mayer-Serra), México D. F. : Editorial Atlante, Vol. III, pp. 913-918.