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Exile and Memory in Post-Franco Spain: Julián Orbón's *Libro de cantares* (1987)

On 13th December 1988, *Libro de cantares* (1987) a song cycle for mezzo-soprano and piano composed by Julián Orbón (1925-1991), was premiered at the Campoamor theatre in Oviedo (Asturias, in Northern Spain). Orbón, who was born in the nearby city of Avilés in 1925, left for Havana in 1940 following the violence and deprivation of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and early Franco regime. He subsequently exiled from Fidel Castro's Cuba in 1961, spent two years in Mexico City (where he taught at the Conservatorio Nacional's Taller de Composición under the leadership of Carlos Chávez) and settled in New York in 1963. In Cuba first and then in the United States, Orbón established a solid reputation as a composer across the Americas. However, when *Libro de cantares* was premiered, it had only been a few years since Orbón had started gaining recognition in his native Asturias. The region, and Spain itself, were at the time entering a new democratic era after Franco's death in 1975, with national and regional institutions trying to build understandings of memory and identity that matched the new political sensibilities. *Libro de cantares*, particularly when read alongside the circumstances in which it was composed and premiered, invites complex readings that centre the categories of exile, modernity and memory and help disentangle the multifarious and sometimes contradictory discourses around these categories that have informed the historiography of Spanish twentieth-century music from the Franco era to our days. In this article, I intend to open up some such readings about this work – which remains unpublished and unrecorded, and has only been performed very rarely.¹

¹ The manuscript of the work is located at the Lilly Library of Indiana University Bloomington, among Orbón's papers. Indiana University Bloomington has hosted a Latin American Music Center (LAMC) since 1961, initially under the direction of Chilean Juan Orrego-Salas, who knew Orbón personally. It is likely that such connections, as well as the

Why Orbón? Displacement and Historiography

While the last thirty years have seen the publication of a considerable number of studies on individual composers who left Spain as a consequence of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939),² scholars have been less active in engaging in historiographical reflection on exile. Recourse to other academic disciplines, as well as the identification of commonalities and trends that emerge from the comparison between individual composers, allows us to identify key categories which can help us understand Orbón and *Libro de cantares* —and which can be in turn further expanded and illuminated by detailed engagement with this work. Two of these key categories are modernity and memory. Concerning the former, Mari Paz Balibrea writes

strategic importance of the LAMC in promoting the academic study of Latin American music, played a role in Orbón's papers being transferred there. LAMC hosts several personal papers and collections of Latin American composers and musicians. However, Orbón's are currently not listed among those

(https://lamc.indiana.edu/archives_special_collections/index.html), but are rather hosted at the Lilly Library in the same institution.

² Roberto Gerhard is likely the composer to have attracted the most attention, including at an international level: see for example Leticia Sánchez de Andrés, *Pasión, desarraigo y literatura: el compositor Robert Gerhard* (Madrid: Fundación Scherzo, 2013); Monty Adkins and Michael Russ, eds, *The Roberto Gerhard Companion* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013). A great deal of significant research on exiled composers has been published in the form of articles and book chapters rather than monographs, such as Susana Asensio Llamas's on Eduardo Martínez Torner, Christiane Heine's on Salvador Bacarisse, and Consuelo Carredano's on Rodolfo Halffter and Adolfo Salazar.

that the historiography of Spanish twentieth-century literature typically conceptualizes exile as a crisis of modernity, with the modernizing project for Spain that the cultural left undertook from the 1920s being thwarted by the anti-modernizing forces of the Franco regime.³ Balibrea argues that such conceptualizations do not acknowledge that different exiles had different modernizing projects and understandings of modernity,⁴ or that the Franco regime also assimilated, originated, and nurtured a variety of modernizing projects.⁵ Like writers, Spanish composers too were diverse in their understandings of modernity in ways that have not always been properly disentangled.⁶ The concept of memory, on the other hand, allows us to analyse how the exiles engaged, through their compositions and other activities, in remembrance and memory-building processes, either at the individual or collective level; and to how their works and legacy were integrated in similar processes at the hands of various communities and

³ Mari Paz Balibrea, 'Rethinking Spanish Republican Exile. An introduction', *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 6/1 (2005), 10.

⁴ Mari Paz Balibrea, 'De los *Cultural Studies* a los Estudios Culturales: el caso del exilio republicano', *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 11/3-4 (2010), 258; Mari Paz Balibrea, *Tiempo de exilio. Una mirada crítica a la modernidad española desde el pensamiento republicano en el exilio* (Madrid: Montesinos, 2007), 64.

⁵ Mari Paz Balibrea, 'Max Aub y el espacio/tiempo de la nación', in *Escritores, editoriales y revistas del exilio republicano de 1939*, ed. Manuel Aznar Soler (Sevilla: Renacimiento, 2006), 165.

⁶ Eva Moreda Rodríguez, 'Why do Orchestral and Band Musicians in Exile Matter? A Case Study from Spain', *Music and Letters*, 101/1 (2020), 73-4.

institutions, most notably after Franco's death.⁷ Indeed, most displaced musicians found themselves juggling multiple identities in exile (Spaniard; Republican, communist or some other political allegiance; Catalan, Basque or Galician; the national identity of their host country) that were not necessarily contradictory, and, conversely, many found themselves reclaimed or vindicated by multiple communities attempting at creating their own collective memories.

Studying Orbón, a Spanish musician displaced and understudied through the aforementioned categories,⁸ enables us to both contextualize his *Libro de cantares* as well as

⁷ On the part-individual, part-collective nature of memory-building processes: see Barbara A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Maidenhead, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2003), 11.

⁸ Velia Yedra was the first scholar to occupy herself extensively with Orbón in Velia Yedra, *Julián Orbón. A Biographical and Critical Essay* (Coral Gables, FL: Institute of Cuban Studies, University of Miami, 1990); this is, however, a study of rather modest dimensions, and so there still exists considerable scope for detailed study of Orbón's works as well as for critical appraisals of his trajectory. Orbón's connections with literary circles in Cuba as well as his work *Tres versiones sinfónicas* are explored in more detail in Mariana Villanueva, *El latido de la ausencia. Una aproximación a Julián Orbón, el músico de Orígenes* (Mexico City: CRIM-UNAM, 2014). More recent studies that focus on Orbón's transnational mobility and identity include Victoria Eli Rodríguez, 'Julián Orbón: la remota aventura de la migración', in *Huellas y rostros. Exilios y migraciones en la construcción de la memoria musical de Latinoamérica*, ed. Consuelo Carredano and Olga Picún (Mexico City: UNAM, 2017), 191-206; and Gemma Salas Villar, 'La confluencia de dos culturas en la música de Julián Orbón', *Cuadernos de Música Iberoamericana*, 6 (2018), 17-33. These studies have

expanding our understanding of such categories. Most Spanish composers displaced as a result of the Civil War had been active in musical life since at least the 1920s, and most notably in the 1930s under the Spanish Second Republic (1931-1936) —a time of increasing political polarization. In this context, many of them understood their commitment to the musical avant-garde or to the research of Spanish traditional music as a left-wing, reformist political project.⁹ Born in 1926, Orbón was too young to become active in political or cultural circles in Asturias before the war, and his understanding of Second Republic politics were likely coloured by his and his family's experience.¹⁰ Since early childhood, Orbón lived in Avilés with his paternal family, while his father, Benjamín Orbón, managed the Conservatorio Orbón in Ciego de Ávila (Cuba). Orbón's uncle, also called Julián, was a well-known right-wing journalist who already came into scrutiny during the 1934 miners' strike in Asturias (*Revolución de Asturias*) and was finally executed by pro-Republic militias during the Civil War. Velia Yedra cites the threat of further violence and the scarcity of post-war Spain —rather than political matters— as the reasons why Benjamín Orbón decided to take young Julián to live with him in Cuba in 1940.¹¹ In his correspondence and other personal documents, Orbón did not make any positive or negative judgments of either the Republic or the Franco regime. However, what is clear is that

occupied themselves in detail with a relatively small part of Orbón's oeuvre, and so there is still scope of further study of Orbón's works and how they interface with his transnational mobility – as the present article hopes to demonstrate.

⁹ Moreda Rodríguez, 'Why do Orchestral and Band Musicians in Exile Matter?', 74-6.

¹⁰ Orbón's papers start from his years in Cuba; early events in Orbón's life, and specifically those of a political nature, are not alluded to in his correspondence.

¹¹ Yedra, *Julián Orbón*, 9-10.

his experience of the Civil War must have been fundamentally different to that of older, more politically committed displaced composers.

In Cuba, Orbón studied composition with another Spanish expatriate, José Ardévol. His earliest local success dates from 1946, when Erich Kleiber conducted his Symphony in C in Havana.¹² Orbón also became active in the nascent Pan-American musical movement, which began in the late 1930s under the Roosevelt administration, with the Division of Cultural Relations establishing a Music section that sponsored a range of activities (including Aaron Copland's trip to Latin America in 1941).¹³ Musical Pan-Americanism aimed at fostering friendly relationships between the United States and the rest of the Americas, in line with 'Good Neighbor' policies and the changing post-World War II sensibilities.¹⁴ While Hess has extensively explored the complex and controversial implications of musical Pan-Americanism for the reception of Latin American art music in the US,¹⁵ a lesser studied aspect of the movement concerns the effect it had on the careers of Latin American composers. In the case of Orbón, this effect was rather positive. In 1946, he was awarded a scholarship to study with Aaron Copland at the Berkshire Music Center in Tanglewood. There he became acquainted with other American composers, including Alberto Ginastera, Roque Cordero, Juan Orrego-Salas, Héctor Tosar, Lukas Foss and Leonard Bernstein.¹⁶ A further breakthrough came in

¹² Yedra, *Julián Orbón*, 19.

¹³ Carol A. Hess, *Representing the Good Neighbor: Music, Difference, and the Pan American Dream* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3.

¹⁴ Carol A. Hess, 'Copland in Argentina: Pan Americanist Politics, Folklore, and the Crisis in Modern Music', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 66/1 (2013), 191.

¹⁵ Hess, *Representing the Good Neighbor*.

¹⁶ Yedra, *Julián Orbón*, 20.

1954, with *Tres versiones sinfónicas* (1953) receiving the Juan Landaeta prize at the Festival de Música Latinoamericana in Caracas, where Orbón met Brazilian Heitor Villa-Lobos.¹⁷ From October 1958, Orbón lived in New York for a year under a Guggenheim scholarship, working on his music and collaborating with local dance companies.¹⁸

In 1961, Orbón left Cuba due to his uneasiness with the Cuban Revolution project (which he initially supported),¹⁹ settling in Ciudad de México for two years and subsequently in New York, where he resided for the rest of his life.²⁰ While Orbón struggled with health

¹⁷ Julián Orbón, 'Una carta de Lezama en la muerte de Héitor Villalobos (sic)', unpublished manuscript, ca. 1959, Julián Orbón Collection, Lilly Library.

¹⁸ Julián Orbón, letter to José Lezama Lima, 11 October 1958, unpublished, Julián Orbón Collection, Lilly Library. Several letters from Orbón to well-known Cuban novelist Lezama Lima will be cited throughout this article. The two men met in the 1940s as part of the literary group Orígenes, and they remained in contact throughout their lives, with Lezama Lima often acting as Orbón's confidant.

¹⁹ Yedra, *Julián Orbón*, 27. For Orbón's political positions about the Cuban Revolution see: Julián Orbón, 'Carta abierta a Graham Greene', *The New Republic*, 2nd November 1963; Julián Orbón, letter to Carlos Chávez, 31 August 1960, reprinted in Gloria Carmona, ed, *Epistolario selecto de Carlos Chávez* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1989), 861.

²⁰ Orbón, however, died in Miami on 20th May 1991; he initially arrived in the city on a temporary engagement at the University of Miami, and was diagnosed with cancer during his stay.

issues and periods of inactivity and depression due to his nostalgia for Cuba,²¹ his career continued to develop rather successfully, and his position within Pan-American circles solidified. He developed good working relationships with a number of performers, and his works (especially *Tres versiones sinfónicas*) were frequently performed by North American orchestras.²² Orbón's Pan-American reputation was rather unique among Spanish displaced composers: some, such as Rodolfo Halffter and Julián Bautista, did have some presence in transnational festivals and networks in Latin America, but none achieved the recognition Orbón had in the United States and specifically within the Pan-American movement.

For Orbón, his Spanish origins and his Pan-American career and reputation were not in contradiction, and he was of the view that Hispanic or Latin-American music should build upon a foundation of Spanish early music, which he knew extensively.²³ Both his success and his ideas make him rather unique both within the Pan-American movement and among Spanish displaced composers. Some of the major figures of musical Pan-Americanism, such as Carlos Chávez, were drawn towards the Americas' indigenous musical heritage; for other composers, it was still Europe (rather than Spain specifically) that provided a frame of reference for Latin American music to develop, although European heritage was typically approached with a

²¹ Julián Orbón, letters to José Lezama Lima, 3 April 1968 and 12 July 1971, unpublished, Julián Orbón Collection, Lilly Library.

²² For example, by St Louis Symphony Orchestra (1964), Phoenix Symphony Orchestra, Detroit Symphony Orchestra (1976), Greater Miami Philharmonic (1977), Dallas Symphony Orchestra (1979), Philadelphia Orchestra, Cleveland Symphony Orchestra (1981), Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Dallas Symphony Orchestra (1985).

²³ Julián Orbón, 'Two lectures by Orbón', undated, unpublished (Julián Orbón Collection, Lilly Library, University of Indiana).

critical perspective rather than uncritically copied and absorbed. Spanish music was certainly not unknown throughout Latin America towards the middle decades of the twentieth century: Manuel de Falla was an overall respected figure, and many displaced Spaniards (Rodolfo Halffter in Mexico, Vicente Salas Viu in Chile, Enrique Casal Chapí in the Dominican Republic and Uruguay) held influential teaching positions in composition and/or musicology in different parts of the continent, and to a great extent shaped these disciplines in their host countries. However, Orbón was relatively unique in centring Spanish music (rather than indigenous music, or the European canon as a block) in his work and thinking.

Similarly, while many if not most Spanish displaced composers indeed engaged with the early and traditional music of Spain, few deployed the same depth and scope as Orbón. Orbón became interested in Spanish early music as an adolescent, and he occupied himself with a wide range of periods and repertoires, including the medieval *cantigas* of Alfonso X (in *Tres cantigas del rei*, 1960), the 14th-century *Llibre Vermell de Montserrat* (*Preludio y fantasía-tiento*, 1974), Victoria's polyphony (*Partite no. 4*, 1982-5), the music of the *vihuelistas* (*Tres versiones sinfónicas*; *Partita no. 3*, 1965-8; *Preludio y fantasía-tiento*), eighteenth-century keyboard music (*Homenaje a Padre Soler*, 1942), the *Tonadilla escénica* (*Homenaje a la tonadilla*, 1947), and some traditional music. With few exceptions (such as *Preludio y danza* [1950-1980], for solo guitar), Orbón's works are formally and structurally ambitious, often taking baroque and classical forms as a model. For example, the four 'partitas' (although not originally conceived as a series) explore the idea of instrumental variation/diminution typical of Renaissance and Baroque instrumental music. Sometimes, the starting point for variation is a very short motif from a literal quotation (e.g. Victoria's 'O magnum mysterium' in *Partita no. 4* and Luys de Milán's Pavane in *Tres versiones sinfónicas*). Orchestration (in *Tres versiones sinfónicas*, *Homenaje a la tonadilla*, *Partita no. 4* and *Concerto grosso* (1958)) is also skilfully put to the service of motivic development.

Also uniquely, Orbón was mostly self-taught in the history of Spanish music; he was not part of networks of Spanish musicologists and composers where ideas and discourses about traditional and early Spanish music circulated. For example, he came into contact with Galician-Portuguese medieval *cantigas* through the editions which Higiní Anglès published under Francoism,²⁴ but never met or even corresponded with Anglès himself, who remained an influential figure on other displaced composers despite ideological differences.²⁵ Over the years, though, Orbón did correspond with a few figures, such as Gustavo Durán, Ernesto Halffter, and Joaquín Nin-Culmell (of Cuban and Spanish descent but never a resident of Spain). Musical and musicological matters occasionally appear in this correspondence: Durán worked with Orbón on the arrangement of a traditional song from Salamanca²⁶ and he joked that Orbón's musical personality was entirely Castilian.²⁷ Nin-Culmell wrote that in Orbón's

²⁴ Higiní Anglès, *La música de las Cantigas de Santa María del rey Alfonso el Sabio* (Barcelona: Publicaciones de la Sección de Música, 1943-1964).

²⁵ Such as Roberto Gerhard, Jesús Bal y Gay and Adolfo Salazar; see Eva Moreda Rodríguez, 'Early Music in Francoist Spain: Higiní Anglès and the Exiles', *Music & Letters*, 96/2 (2015), 209-227.

²⁶ Gustavo Durán, letter to Julián Orbón, 31 October 1968, unpublished, Julián Orbón Collection, Lilly Library.

²⁷ Gustavo Durán, letter to Julián Orbón, 16 May 1967, unpublished, Julián Orbón Collection, Lilly Library. Durán was a composer active in the 1920s and 1930s, a Lieutenant Colonel of the Spanish Republican Army during the Civil War, and then, from 1942, a spy and diplomat of the United States who only pursued music and composition privately. It is likely that him and Orbón met during Durán's tenure at the Havana embassy (1942-45).

music he could hear ‘the link between your music and the great Spanish composers such as Victoria and Falla, but also the Hispanic vitality of our Pearl of the Caribbean’.²⁸ However, all-in-all, Orbón remained isolated from both the Spanish musicological establishment under Franco (such as Anglès’s Instituto Español de Musicología) and from the networks shaped by more active exiles such as Adolfo Salazar, Jesús Bal y Gay, Salvador Bacarisse or Roberto Gerhard.

Unlike other displaced composers, Orbón, by virtue of his younger age, lived to see the first sixteen years of the democratic regime in Spain, and also engaged with it to an extent. This aspect of Orbón’s career will be discussed in more detail in the next section, as it decisively helps in contextualizing the composition and reception of *Libro de cantares*.

The context for *Libro de cantares*

In January 1967, Orbón befriended composer Ernesto Halffter during a visit of the latter to New York. Halffter was impressed by Orbón’s music and mediated so that Orbón’s *Monte Gelboé* (1962) for tenor, orchestra and choir, was included in the programme of the second Festival de Música de América y España in the autumn of the same year.²⁹ The festival (whose first iteration took place in 1964, and its third and last in 1970), organized by the Spanish

Apart from the two instances discussed in the text, his correspondence with Orbón is to a great extent of a personal nature.

²⁸ Joaquín Nin-Culmell, letter to Julián Orbón, 8 December 1983, unpublished, Julián Orbón Collection, Lilly Library.

²⁹ Ernesto Halffter, letter to Julián Orbón, 15 August 1967, unpublished, Julián Orbón Collection, Lilly Library.

government, was a high-profile event held in Madrid aimed at bringing together composers from Spain and the Americas, in line with the late Franco regime's stance of openness and modernization. The occasion marked Orbón's first trip to Spain since 1940, and after the festival he travelled to Asturias to visit his family. Back in Cuba, he struggled with the realization that the siblings he had left behind in Asturias had become strangers to him.³⁰

From 1984, however, Orbón resumed contact with Asturias, and this time his experience (including a visit in 1986) was more positive. Asturias was at the time a budding *autonomía*—one of seventeen autonomous regions that Spain was divided into under the new parliamentary democratic regime after Franco. During the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, as Spanish institutions sought to redefine the country's collective memory,³¹ *autonomías* were also involved in identity- and memory-building processes on their own. In some *autonomías*, especially in Catalonia and the Basque Country, such processes sometime collided with those of the nation states. In other contexts, including Asturias, regional and national memories could coexist more peacefully.³² Such coexistence partially drew upon the Francoist past: indeed,

³⁰ Julián Orbón, letter to José Lezama Lima, 24 December 1967, unpublished, Julián Orbón Collection, Lilly Library. See also José Lezama Lima, letter to Julián Orbón, February 1968, in José Lezama Lima, *Cartas (1939-1976)*, ed. Eloísa Lezama Lima (Madrid: Orígenes, 1979), 103-104.

³¹ Andreas Lagenohl, 'Memory in Post-Authoritarian Societies', in *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 166.

³² For discussions of how regions, or other units, can constitute themselves as mnemonic communities of their own, without necessarily conflicting with the nation-state, see: Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, 'Presentación', *Ayer* 64 (2006), 14; Vita Fortunati and Elena Lamberti,

Francoist institutions, although nationalist and centralist, did not completely obliterate regional identities, and they were well aware that celebrating and promoting regional particularities could serve to strengthen national identity to an extent. Traditional music and dance from all Spanish regions were collected, performed and celebrated not as markers of difference, but rather as different expressions of the same national identity.³³ Similarly, the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas – the national research council created by the regime in 1939 – founded and supported several *institutos de estudios locales* (institutes for local studies) in the Spanish provinces, including Asturias, with the aim to pursue research into regional history, literature and music. When *autonomías* started to engage in their own identity- and memory-building processes, they were often careful to reinterpret or reconstruct these practices to fit within the new democratic ideals of civic nationalism. Asturias is a case in point, having had an important role in the regime’s public imagination. Under Francoism, Asturias was celebrated as the place in which the *Reconquista* started: according to predominant historiographical narratives, a reduced number of Visigothic noblemen allegedly took refuge in the mountains of Asturias after the Iberian Peninsula was invaded by the Umayyad Caliphate in 711, and from there they started a centuries-long war (the *Reconquista*) between Christians and Muslims which eventually led to the expulsion of the latter in 1492 (and the birth of Spain as a modern state). More precisely, Francoism celebrated the beginning of the *Reconquista* every 8th September, designated as the feast of Our Lady of Covadonga—who had allegedly

‘Cultural Memory: A European Perspective’, *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 127.

³³ Eva Moreda Rodríguez, ‘La mujer que no canta no es ... ¡ni mujer española!: Folklore and Gender in the Earlier Franco Regime’, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 89/6 (2012), 627-644.

helped Christians win their first battle against Muslim troops in 722 in the parish of Covadonga in the Asturian mountains. Under democracy, the 8th September was renamed as “Día de Asturias” (National Day of Asturias), and stripped of official religious references, in consonance with its civic feast nature.³⁴

Orbón’s contacts with Asturias during the 1980s were indeed shaped by some of the developing institutions and practices established under democracy. In 1984, Orbón was nominated to the Príncipe de Asturias awards, introduced back in 1980. The awards aimed at distinguishing both Spanish and international personalities in a range of arts and science fields, were organized under the patronage of the then-Prince of Asturias Felipe de Borbón, and its award ceremony took place at the Teatro Campoamor in Oviedo. Therefore, they played an important part in the construction of democratic identity, confirming that Asturias was a modern region fully integrated within the Spanish monarchy, immersed in and highly connected with the international intellectual and scientific context. In September 1988, two songs from *Libro de cantares* were premiered on the Día de Asturias (before the full premiere in December of that year), and the newly created Orquesta Sinfónica del Principado de Asturias (OSPA) chose *Tres versiones sinfónicas* for one of its first concerts ever in 1991. Like the Príncipe de Asturias awards, the OSPA also had a significant role in the construction of regional identity. Indeed, after Franco’s death several Spanish *autonomías*, provinces and municipalities founded and funded their own symphony orchestras, therefore signalling a commitment to breaking away with centralism and supporting the arts.

Orbón’s interactions with Asturian institutions were also covered in the regional and local press, which highlighted certain aspects of his personality and trajectory over others in an attempt to integrate him into new understanding of Asturian identity and memory. Firstly,

³⁴ Ley 5/1984, 24th June 1984.

newspaper reviews and concert programmes repeatedly mentioned Orbón's alleged attachment to Asturias and/or Avilés. José Martínez argued that Orbón 'has practically never lived here, but he felt profoundly connected to this place,'³⁵ and Pilar Rubiera reported that Orbón had experienced one of the most emotional moments in his life upon listening to a recording of the Orquesta Sinfónica del Principado de Asturias.³⁶ Writers, however, did not comment on the fact that Orbón had remained mostly unconnected from his native region until his mature years.³⁷ Secondly, journalists and other writers extolled Orbón's international stature, sometimes in hyperbolic tones, as proof that Asturias and Asturians could achieve international success.³⁸ The transnational dimensions of Orbón's career, his complex allegiances and his understanding of his national identity, were rarely explored. Very few writers engaged with Orbón's transnational identity. An exception was Ramón G. Avello, who described Orbón as 'essentially a Hispanic-American musician.'³⁹

³⁵ José Martínez, 'Julián Orbón', 13th February 1992, *La Nueva España*, no page number available.

³⁶ Pilar Rubiera, 'Falleció en Nueva York, a los 65 años, el compositor asturiano Julián Orbón', *La Nueva España*, 22nd May 1991, 48.

³⁷ For example, while both Cuba and the United States were home to sizeable communities of Asturian immigrants, there is no evidence that Orbón engaged with them.

³⁸ Álvarez-Buylla, 'La Semana de Música rinde homenaje a Julián Orbón', *La Voz de Asturias*, 26th January 1992; Luis M. Alonso, 'Orbón, la mejor página musical en el olvido', *La Nueva España*, 14th February 1992.

³⁹ Ramón G. Avello, 'Julián Orbón, la entraña de las dos orillas', *El Comercio*, 12th May 1991, 46. See also Carmelo Morán, 'Orbón centra la Semana de Música de Avilés', *La Voz de Asturias*, 5th April 1992.

Thirdly, Orbón's trajectory was commonly talked about as a narrative of neglect and subsequent reparation. Writers claimed that in the past Orbón had been neglected, ignored or silenced by 'the authorities' and implied that the composer had only recently received the recognition he deserved thanks to the new Asturian democratic institutions.⁴⁰ These claims were vague: Orbón had never fought against Franco or been actively involved in anti-Franco activism, and it is doubtful that there was an active intention to remove him from Spanish concert halls under Franco. By leaving these nuances aside, however, journalists and institutions could insinuate that new Asturias government was repairing the injustices committed by the dictatorship, which was crucial to the construction of democratic memory.

Dialogue in *Libro de cantares*

In the same way as media portrayals of Orbón selected certain details of his life in order to construct a persona that could be attractive to the nascent collective memory of Asturias, Orbón himself selected and juxtaposed other pre-existing materials to engage with individual and collective memory when composing *Libro de cantares*. Many Spanish displaced composers used or referenced Spanish traditional music in their works, but *Libro de cantares* is unique because of its oblique, dialogic approach. Instead of using traditional materials directly, Orbón did so through engagement with the work of two other personalities who extensively occupied themselves with traditional music: Eduardo Martínez Torner and Manuel de Falla (both, like

⁴⁰ José Antonio Gómez, 'Fallece el compositor asturiano Julián Orbón', *La Voz de Asturias*, 22nd May 1991; Alonso, 'Orbón, la mejor página musical en el olvido'; anonymous, 'Julián Orbón: la recuperación de un nombre', *Papeles de la Casa Municipal de Cultura de Avilés*, 33 (1992), 10.

Orbón, displaced from Spain). In doing so, *Libro de cantares* calls attention to the fact that memory-building processes centred around traditional music are never exclusively individual, but they are also influenced and mediated by generations of others who engaged with traditional music before.

The ten songs in *Libro de cantares* are all based on traditional melodies collected by Eduardo Martínez Torner (1888-1955) in the *Cancionero de la lírica popular asturiana* (1920) (see table 1).⁴¹ Like Orbón, Martínez Torner was a displaced composer: an active supporter of the Spanish Republican government during the Spanish Civil War, he sought exile in London in early 1939, and died there in 1955, never having set foot in Spain again.⁴² The *Cancionero*, compiled in the earlier part of his career, stems from his preoccupation with researching and recovering Spain's past as a pre-condition for its modernization.⁴³ As a member of the progressive environments of the Residencia de Estudiantes and the Centro de Estudios Históricos,⁴⁴ Martínez Torner was a pioneer in Spain to use the then-innovative tools of

⁴¹ In fact, in the original manuscript the work bears the subtitle *De un cancionero asturiano (Torner)*.

⁴² José Antonio Gómez Rodríguez, 'La España de plata de Eduardo Martínez Torner, 1888-1955', *Cuadernos de Música y Teatro* 3 (1998), 60.

⁴³ María Luisa Mallo del Campo, *Torner. Más allá del folklore* (Oviedo: Universidad de Oviedo, 1980), 12 and 35.

⁴⁴ Literally, 'Student Hall' and 'Centre for Historical Studies'. The Residencia de Estudiantes was modelled after Oxford and Cambridge colleges, intending to provide university students with a vibrant cultural environment, whereas the Centro de Estudios Históricos focused on conducting historical research on Spanish topics using some of the latest historiographical methods coming from Europe. Both were founded in 1910, and both fell under the umbrella

German and French systematic musicology to collect and study traditional song.⁴⁵ Although his focus on music as text instead of practice may seem positivistic from our present-day perspective, he made important innovations in his time: he was the first Spanish folklorist to systematically show an interest in the interaction between music and words, and in geographically-based classification.⁴⁶ Martínez Torner's work had a sense of urgency to it: he was aware that the contexts in which traditional music was cultivated and disseminated were quickly disappearing because of industrialization and urbanization, and in particular he was concerned that *zarzuela* and other urban genres were replacing traditional music – and hence his rush to record and memorialize the latter using the most up-to-date tools available at the time.⁴⁷ Memory therefore appears as a useful category to approach *Libro de cantares*: using traditional song as the basis for art song does not necessarily denote a desire to engage with memory politics, but, given Orbón's interest in the study and memorialization of Spain's musical past, he would have been well aware of the complexities and nuances around memory involved in putting together a work such as Martínez Torner's.

of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza (literally, 'Free Institution for Education'), a non-governmental project which aimed at reforming the education system as a prerequisite for the modernization of Spain.

⁴⁵ Susana Asensio Llamas, 'Eduardo Martínez Torner y la Junta para Ampliación de Estudios en España', *Arbor*, 187/751 (2011), 857.

⁴⁶ Susana Asensio, *Fuentes para el estudio de la música popular asturiana. A la memoria de Eduardo Martínez Torner* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2010), 27; Israel E. Katz, 'A closer look at Eduardo M. Torner's Bibliographic Survey of Spain's Traditional Music and Dance', *Anuario Musical* 59 (2004), 246.

⁴⁷ Asensio, *Fuentes para el estudio*, 29.

Orbón's background and relationship with traditional music also points towards memory as a fruitful category of study for *Libro de cantares*. Orbón was almost forty years younger than Martínez Torner, spent his early life in an urban environment and never lived in Asturias as an adult, and so he would have had much fewer opportunities than Martínez Torner's to engage first-hand with the traditional music of his native region: there is indeed no evidence among his papers that he was a performer or regular listener of Asturian traditional music in his childhood. Being aware of this background can help us understand *Libro de cantares* as an act of remediation:⁴⁸ indeed, Orbón takes his materials from Martínez Torner, but by arranging and presenting them differently, he creates a different representation of the past. These differences can be partly explained by his relationship to his home country and home region, and the music thereof.

In his selection of original songs, Orbón did not choose to reflect the totality of Asturias, as Martínez Torner did, but he did not focus on his lived experience in environment of Avilés either. In fact, none of the songs in *Libro de cantares* come from Avilés or its surrounding; all of them originated from a small area placed in the centre of Asturias and delimited by three points: Oviedo and the surrounding villages south of the mountains of Naranco; the mining area of Aller (about 25 miles south-east of Oviedo); and the area of Somiedo (about 45 miles south-west of Oviedo). While Orbón might not have had much of a direct connection with these places, all three allude to some of the tropes typically connected to Asturias regional identity under democracy. The pre-Romanesque sanctuary of Santa María del Naranco, one of the earliest surviving churches in the Iberian Peninsula, hinted at Asturias' role in the historical

⁴⁸ Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, 'Cultural memory and its dynamics', *Mediation, Remediation and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, eds Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 6.

construction of Spain (but without the more Franco-related associations of Covadonga), and the exuberant landscapes of Somiedo confirmed the region as the ‘green corner’ of Spain, clearly distinct from Andalusia, Castile and the Mediterranean coast. The connection to the mining industry prevalent in Aller is perhaps the most interesting, considering Orbón’s childhood experience of the 1934 miners’ strike discussed earlier in this article; indeed, under democracy, the activism of the Asturian mining communities could easily be presented as proof of the anti-authoritarian, progressive credentials of the recently created *autonomía*. However, his choice of tropes does not mean that Orbón merely aimed at putting together a work that fulfilled the requirements of the democratic institutions, since in other respects he did not follow the prevalent tropes. For example, he focused on inland regions only and did not choose any songs from the coast and fishing communities, even though Martínez Torner’s *Cancionero* contains plenty of songs from those areas and they were also prominently represented in constructions of Asturian identity in early democracy.

The song ‘Canción (Habanera) (Giraldilla 4) (Somiedo)’ (number VIII in the cycle) provides another example of how Orbón crafted pre-existing materials to build an understanding of memory and identity which was different from that of Martínez Torner and from that of the institutions that welcomed him in the 1980s. The piece takes a *giraldilla*⁴⁹ in 3/8 compiled by Martínez Torner, rewritten in 6/8 by Orbón. The piano accompaniment, however, is in 2/4 and follows an *habanera* rhythmic pattern, to go with the lyrics, which refer to the boat journey to Havana.⁵⁰ Orbón’s choice therefore hints at one further aspect of

⁴⁹ A song originally intended as a round folk song, but which could then become independent of its original function and be sung in a variety of contexts.

⁵⁰ ‘*Yo no soy habanero, que si lo fuera en el barco llevara la compañera*’ (I am not from Havana, because if I were, I would take my companion in the ship with me).

the region's history and memory: the trade exchanges and migration over the centuries, which resulted in improved standards of living in Asturias and also in the circulation of musics (such as *habaneras* themselves) and musicians (including Orbón and his father). Such musical exchanges with Latin America were not exclusive to Asturias, and indeed extended to the rest of Spain.⁵¹ However, as with other regions, Asturias presented some particularities that Orbón would be aware of, specifically, *habaneras* became and are still a staple in the repertoire of Asturian choirs, which often developed (such as the well-known Orfeón de Mieres) in working-class mining and fishing communities. The *habanera* reference helps reinforce Orbón's self-identification as a Hispanic American/Cuban composer, who nevertheless still saw the Spanish music tradition as fundamental. It also contradicts the more static, nostalgic notion of folklore held by Martínez Torner. In the notes to song 294 in the *Cancionero*, Martínez Torner makes a distinction between indigenous ('pure') and imported musics, writing about the piece that 'even though the melody is Asturian, we do not believe it is pure tradition, because it imitates to an extent the dances imported from Cuba by our immigrants.'⁵²

Example 1. Julián Orbón, 'Canción (Habanera) (Giraldilla 4) (Somiedo)' from *Libro de cantares* (1987), mm. 8-14.

⁵¹ For example, in flamenco it is commonplace to talk about '*cantes de ida y vuelta*' (roundtrip songs) to refer to the *palos* or genres originating in Latin America thanks to the hybridization of Peninsular styles and native American traditions.

⁵² Eduardo Martínez Torner, *Cancionero musical de la lírica popular asturiana* (Oviedo: Instituto de Estudios Asturianos, 1971).

With respect to Manuel de Falla, most relevant for the purposes of this article are his displacement and his influential role on the community of exiled composers. Falla left Spain for Buenos Aires in autumn 1939 —mere months after the end of the Spanish Civil War—, having accepted conducting engagements there. However, he did not go back to Spain when his engagements finished and instead stayed in Argentina until his death in 1946. Unlike most other displaced composers, Falla was not under threat from the Franco regime, and had indeed received several invitations to collaborate with government institutions, which thus aspired to gain cultural legitimacy, but he, although a conservative Catholic, was uneasy with the violence of the regime.⁵³

Orbón had admired Falla since his beginnings as a composer in adolescence,⁵⁴ although he never met or corresponded with him. One proof of his admiration is the draft, held among Orbón's papers at Indiana, of an undated talk about the three Spanish artists Orbón considered to be the most international of the twentieth century —Falla, Picasso and García Lorca.⁵⁵ In the text, Orbón reveals himself as a follower of Falla's concept of *nacionalismo de las esencias* (nationalism of essences) —that is, the notion that, rather than focus on literal quotation, composers should distill Spanish traditional musical material until they got to its very

⁵³ Carol A. Hess, *Sacred Passions. The Life and Music of Manuel de Falla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁵⁴ Fina García Marruz, letters to Julián Orbón, 13 April 1981 and 1 August 1982, unpublished, Julián Orbón Collection, Lilly Library, University of Indiana.

⁵⁵ Orbón, 'Two lectures by Orbón'.

essence.⁵⁶ Orbón was by no means alone in his admiration for Falla, and indeed *nacionalismo de las esencias* was influential among many of the younger Spanish composers who started their careers in the 1920s, with literal quotation often being seen as populist and unsophisticated. Orbón too followed Falla when he argued in the draft of his talk that it was preferable to assimilate and revisit folk music sources rather than quote them directly ('the folkloric elements that appear in [Falla]'s music are never taken directly from the original sources but transfigured into new images of sound: we can say that Falla assumes the folklore consubstantially')⁵⁷.

A comparison between *Libro de cantares* and Falla's *Siete canciones populares españolas* (1914) reveals some resemblances that provide further material for the study of memory and identity in the former work. Unlike Martínez Torner, Falla had little to no experience of folksong collection, and, having lived in cities during his childhood and youth, also had limited direct contact with traditional music.⁵⁸ *Siete canciones*, like *Libro de cantares*, took its materials from printed folksong collections rather than from lived experience, and so it cannot be regarded as a work of memorialization in the same way as Martínez Torner's *Cancionero*. Still, the category of memory is relevant here. Firstly, Falla, although not a folklorist himself, studied with Felipe Pedrell, a major figure and pioneer in the study of

⁵⁶ Elena Torres Clemente, 'El "nacionalismo de las esencias": ¿una categoría estética o ética?', in *Discursos y prácticas musicales nacionalistas (1900-1970)*, ed. Pilar López (Logroño: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de La Rioja, 2012), 27.

⁵⁷ Orbón, 'Conferencia', 3.

⁵⁸ Michael Christoforidis, 'Manuel de Falla's "Siete canciones populares españolas": The composer's personal library, folksong models and the creative process', *Anuario Musical*, 55 (2000), 214-5.

Spanish traditional music, and was therefore aware of discourses concerning the erosion of traditional music and its environments, as well as of the efforts to preserve and memorialize it.⁵⁹ Secondly, Orbón's sustained engagement with Spanish music of the past, and in particular his processes of selection, development and juxtaposition, can be interpreted as a further instance of memory-building – involving in this case the music of Falla as a canonic figure in the lineage of Spanish composers.

Orbón did not engage with *Siete canciones* through literal quotation, and in fact it can be said that *Libro de cantares* is uniquely Orbón's (and not Falla's) in its musical vocabulary. For example, *Libro de cantares* contains no direct reference to the only Asturian song in Falla's set, titled, precisely, 'Asturiana'; this could have been an obvious place to establish a link between the two works, yet Orbón did not explore this possibility. However, the broad similarities in how the original melodies are treated (melodically, harmonically), as well as some matters of organization, reveal interesting family resemblances: for example, like Falla with 'Nana', Orbón also included a lullaby in his set ('Añada'). The question whether these resemblances are intentional cannot be easily answered, since Orbón's papers do not contain any unequivocal proof that he indeed intended to pay tribute to Falla with this song cycle. However, Orbón's life-long admiration for Falla, as well as his painstaking use of direct and indirect allusion from other works throughout his career (as discussed earlier) make intentionality a very viable possibility.

Earlier in this section I discussed *nacionalismo de las esencias*, which both Falla and Orbón embraced in their writings. However, an immediately obvious resemblance between the two song cycles is that neither composer adhered to *nacionalismo de las esencias* despite their defence of the concept. Both take the traditional melodies from the source with few or no

⁵⁹ Christoforidis, 'Manuel de Falla's "Siete canciones populares españolas"', 216.

modifications; indeed, the most frequent types of modifications are transpositions (see table) and the elongation of the last note of a phrase. The melody therefore remains immediately recognizable and is typically placed in the middle range of the voice, retaining the ‘pure’ and ‘natural’ quality that appealed to collectors such as Martínez Torner. In both cases, moreover, the harmony maintains an essentially tonal contour, but it is expanded through clustered dissonances, as in Falla’s ‘Seguidilla murciana’ and Orbón’s ‘Baile de pandero’.

Example 2a. Manuel de Falla, ‘Seguidilla murciana’ from *Siete canciones populares españolas* (1914), mm. 2-6.

Example 2b. Julián Orbón, ‘Baile de pandero’ from *Libro de cantares*, mm. 20-24.

A further similarity concerns the use of hemiola, as shown in examples 3a and 3b. Hemiola is, a rather widely used signifier in Spanish music, and this again begs the question whether Orbón might have wanted to specifically reference Falla or is simply echoing a broader trope. As suggested in the previous paragraphs, the resemblances between Falla’s and Orbón’s song cycles are subtle and general, rather than specific; in this context, it is possible to regard the hemiola as a further example of family resemblance, which, at the same time, is generic enough to connect *Libro de cantares* to the broader tradition of Spanish music. The use of hemiola therefore resembles that of the *habanera* rhythm discussed above: the *habanera* can be interpreted as a direct reference to Orbón’s Cuban-Asturian identity and to the links between Cuba and Asturias – but it also connects with a long tradition of composers (both within and outside Spain) who used the *habanera* rhythm as a signifier of Spanish identity.

Example 3a. Manuel de Falla, 'El paño moruno' from *Siete canciones populares españolas*,
mm. 31-38.

Example 3b. Julián Orbón, 'Canción (Pelúgano, Aller y Oviedo)' from *Libro de cantares*,
mm. 92-100.

Conclusion

Two subsequent performances of *Libro de cantares* serve to further illuminate how the work stands at the intersection of different understandings of memory and identity. In the first of these performances, in February 1992 in New York, it was programmed alongside works by Latin American composers celebrating Spanish poet Federico García Lorca (executed in the early days of the Spanish Civil War). The second, in July 1999 in Los Angeles, was a concert of Cuban song ranging from nineteenth-century art song to the works of Bola de Nieve. Indeed, Orbón's selection, elaboration and juxtaposition of a range of materials, combined with Orbón's own trajectory, allowed these same materials to be read and hierarchized in different manners, therefore resonating in different ways with different communities.

While this ambivalence is certainly nothing unusual among the community of Spanish displaced composers, the two events, read alongside *Libro de cantares* and its reception as discussed above, suggest two ways in which Orbón can provide nuance to our understanding of the historiography of Spanish music in exile and how it interfaces with issues of memory and modernity. Firstly, Orbón's later date of birth compared to other displaced composers allowed him to develop a different view of memorialization processes: instead of engaging

with material directly to build Asturian or Spanish memory in *Libro de cantares*, he was aware of others who had engaged in processes of memorialization before and referenced them in the work – referencing too their different modernity projects (Martínez Torner as a systematic ethnomusicologist, Falla as a modernist composer).

Secondly, as reflected in the Los Angeles event, Orbón was, among Spanish displaced composers, the one who most decidedly integrated himself into Latin American and Pan-American musical circles. This in turn had implications for the construction of memory and modernity in *Libro de cantares*, which therefore stands as a markedly original song cycle. Even though the presence of the *habanera* form is fugacious and had indeed several precedents among Spanish composers, Orbón's commitment to Pan-American musical identity suggests that the *habanera* might not have been simply a comfortable stereotype, but rather a reminder of how his constructions of memory did not turn their back on their host continent and the particular forms of musical modernity and modernism cultivated there.

Number in <i>Libro de Cantares</i> ⁶⁰	Title	Number in the <i>Cancionero</i>
I	Preludio	None (instrumental piece)
II	Añada (Cabañaquinta, ayuntamiento de Aller)	3
VI	Giraldilla (3) (Oviedo)	280 (transposed an ascending semitone; added new lyrics for first stanza)
VIII	Canción (Habanera) (Giraldilla 4) (Somiedo)	247
IX	Canción (Pelúgano, Aller y Oviedo)	114 (transposed a tone downwards)
X	Giraldilla (Trubia)	250
XIV	Epílogo. Retorno del preludio	None (instrumental piece)
	Canción (Naranco y San Esteban de las Cruces (Oviedo)) ⁶¹	403 ⁶²
	Interludio (Canción y glosa)	None (instrumental piece)
	Baile de Pandero (Vaqueiras) (Perlunes – Somiedo, Llanuces, Villamarcel, Ovirós)	470 (with text of second stanza taken from 472, third stanza from 473)

⁶⁰ Numbers have been taken from the manuscript of the work. Six of the pieces are unnumbered.

⁶¹ The three subsequent pieces are presented one after the other in the manuscript, suggesting they could be III, IV and V, respectively.

⁶² Martínez Torner includes five other versions of the same melody (numbers 404-409). 403 is given as originating from Naranco and 406, from San Esteban de Aller, while the others come from other municipalities.

	Interludio I (Retorno del preludio)	None (instrumental piece)
	Canción (Oviedo)	317 (transposed one descending semitone)
	Giraldilla (Castadiello, Morcín)	282

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