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Choirs of the Barceloneta: from Claverian Choral Societies to the Silent Choirs

In the middle of the 19th century the Catalan Countries underwent profound transformations brought about by the process of industrialisation. Thanks to its strategic location, the Barceloneta maritime neighbourhood (Barcelona) would become one of the districts most affected by these changes, its physical face radically altered as it was transformed into one of the most important focal points of Catalan industry. Every spring, at the Pentecost, this neighbourhood was the Choir Festival celebration, a celebration that came from the humorous choral societies that they were created in the origins of the Catalan choral movement.

A meitats del segle XIX als Països Catalans es van donar profundes transformacions ocasionades per l'impuls dels processos d'industrialització. Gràcies a la seva localització estratègica, el barri marítim de la Barceloneta (Barcelona) es convertiria en una de les zones més afectades per aquests canvis socials, i la seva estructura física es veié radicalment alterada transformant-se en un dels punts focals més importants de la indústria catalana. Cada primavera, durant la celebració de la Pentecosta, es du a terme en aquest barri la Festa dels Cors, una celebració que té els seus orígens en els orfeons i les agrupacions corals humorístiques que van aparèixer en els inicis del moviment coral català.

The Origins of the Catalan Choir Movement

In the middle of the 19th century the Catalan Countries¹ underwent profound transformations brought about by the process of industrialisation. The first steam powered machine was installed in Barcelona in 1833 (quite appropriately the Bonaplata textile mill was popularly known as “El Vapor” (The Steamer)), and in 1848 the first railway line was inaugurated between Barcelona and Mataró. Thanks to its strategic location,² the Barceloneta maritime neighbourhood would become one of the districts most affected by these changes, its physical face radically altered as it was transformed into one of the most important focal points of Catalan industry. Faced with this newly developing scenario, a variety of social agents on the ground would shift in the same way the territory itself had, adapting themselves to changes that at times

were seen as an opportunity but almost always viewed with a degree of fear.

One of the people who actively participated in the richly changing cultural and associational panorama being forged in Barcelona in those years was Josep Anselm Clavé. The son of a family of merchants from the nearby Ribera neighbourhood, from a very young age he participated in political initiatives connected to republicanism, while showing particular interest in music. As a result of his social commitment and his participation in various urban revolts at the beginning of the 1840s, he was arrested and detained in the Ciutadella military citadel. It was precisely during his detainment that Clavé thought of temporarily leaving strictly political action in order to create an organization dedicated to worker resistance, with the idea of gathering together financial resources to create a Mutual Support Fund through recitals to be held in cafes and taverns.

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Paraules clau: moviment coral, societats corals humorístiques, música popular, festa popular, celebració veïnal, classes populars, La Barceloneta.



■ Photograph from the early 20th century of Barceloneta's Pomells de Joventut Federation, on an outing.

SOURCE: ARCHIVE OF THE COORDINATOR OF BARCELONETA CHORAL GROUPS.

Yet *La Aurora*, the name of that resistance organization made manifest as a small orchestra and led by Clavé from 1847 to 1850, would end up being too small for the task he had in mind. After contact with Narcís Monturiol, the utopian Icarian movement and emerging cultural initiatives that in one way or another were close to him, and using as his model the choral societies of Saint-Simon, Clavé founded *La Fraternidad* (The Fraternity) in 1850. Grounding his work on the experience and human capital forged in his years with *La Aurora*, Clavé began to give shape to his new project, whose goal

would be the moral education of the working classes through the creation of choral societies.³ Nevertheless, there is no agreement on who would be objectively benefitted by his activity. While for Ricard Vinyes “the Claverian action left a sharp imprint on the culture of the lower classes, spreading and popularising different ethical-social values in alternative to those of the dominant classes,”⁴ and becoming “relevant in the shaping of the communist tradition”, Albert García Balañà in contrast understands that in spite of not sharing his goals with the bourgeoisie, it cannot nevertheless be said that his practice or

his discourse were clearly class-based. He argues that they worked as intermediaries between “the more general propositions of the industrial order and those who recognized themselves in an incipient proletarian identity.”⁵ In this way, more than one hundred and fifty years later, the question set forth in the middle of the 1970s by historian Eva Serra as to whether Clavé “was really a liberator or in fact an accomplice, perhaps naive or unaware, of a form of entertainment that was pacifying and essentially conformist”,⁶ continues to arouse debate.⁷

Choral Societies in the Barceloneta

These first choral societies, made up exclusively of men and created by Josep Anselm Clavé and his disciples, would multiply to such an extent that they chose to set up a coordinating body, the Euterpense Association (A1860), and publish a journal, *El Metrónomo* (1863). Clavé began collaborating with the weekly paper with a series of articles where while explaining the origins of the movement, he would also defend his role as a pioneer in the creation of choral societies throughout Spain in debate with the Tolosa brothers,⁸ claiming that once the *Sociedad Coral La Fraternidad* (The Fraternity Choral Society) had been set up, “its members gave themselves up fully to the study of the choral pieces *La fiesta en la aldea* (Festival in the Town) *La flor de mayo* (The May Flower) and *El tiempo de Terpsicore* [sic] (The Time of Terpsichore) which I composed quite intentionally; and on the 14th of August, 1850 and the 7th of December of the same year, their noteworthy merits were made public, verifying them respectively on San Miguel Street in the Barceloneta and on *Cambios Viejos* Street of this same city.”⁹ Just two years later, *La Fraternidad*, accompanied this time by a new choral society called *La Aurora* in clear homage to Clavé, in what was its third performance, par-

anticipated during “the early hours of the following 11th of April, holiday of Easter ... songs sung in the early dawn of that day that were known in Catalonia by the name of *caramelles*¹⁰ and that both societies performed in various neighbourhoods of the Barceloneta.”¹¹ With these precedents, and in spite of the fact that we do not know the personal identity or where members of the Fraternity Choral Society had their club, it would be difficult to explain such choral activity in the port neighbourhood without there being a close relationship between one or a few members of the choir and the Barceloneta.

While the holiday programming of the choral societies of the Barceloneta was spread out throughout the year, with variations in intensity and aims, the two most important times in the calendar year were precisely the Easter season and Pentecost. The first of them is held on the first Sunday of the first full moon of Spring, being nothing more than the sacralisation of the pagan holiday welcoming good weather, and, with it, the rebirth of nature. As we have just seen, it was traditional to sing *caramelles* during Easter, which was a holiday that was above all preserved amongst townspeople in the mountains, even though it had put down roots in the towns of the Barcelona plain and in the Barceloneta, where maritime motifs were added. The singing of *caramelles* had (and still has) the characteristic of being a moving performance; to follow the criteria set out by the anthropologist Manuel Delgado in *Carrer, festa i revolta* (Street, Festival and Revolt) in characterizing different festive uses of public space, it had a cosmic trajectory, that is, it was a festive activity that moved along a more or less established route and did so in orderly fashion, “dramatically reproducing the ideal terms of distribution of positions in the very heart of the social structure.”¹²

On Easter Sunday, the group of singers would parade down the streets and perform at previously-selected homes, beneath the balconies where the singers’ fiancées might live. Once the show had ended, the singers would push a long staff up to the balconies with a basket hung on the end which was duly filled with foodstuffs, especially eggs. With the food gathered during the singing an outing was arranged, quite typically to Montserrat.¹³ It should be pointed out, with regards to the idea of asking for food from spectators on the balconies, that the *caramelles* are considered the oldest Catalan example of ritual festive extortion, a trait that over time would spread out to other festive practices.¹⁴ Even though in the case of the Barceloneta the customary routes did not leave the neighbourhood streets, thus limiting the festive territory, on special occasions it did go beyond them.

For Pentecost the celebration that still today is most robust involves the choral societies going into the street in costume, parading in orderly fashion to live music (that has changed over time), with large reproductions of their work tools attached to their backs. The Pentecost festival began on Saturday morning, with various choirs walking through the streets by way of good-bye celebration, visiting the clubhouses of the various choral societies. After the parade, the members of the different groups would leave the neighbourhood for an outing that had been planned over the entire year. Two days later, on Pentecost, the choirs would return to the neighbourhood and, in the middle of the afternoon, would parade again, returning once more to the headquarters of the different societies, with the food they had brought back with them from their trip hanging off their clothes.

In spite of this early presence of the Claverian choirs in the Barceloneta,

it was not until 1863 that a choir was officially set up in the neighbourhood. The official organ of the Euterpense Association described its beginnings in this way: “... the young workers who made it up all belonged to the Casino Artesano, in whose headquarters they have a day academy headed up by the intelligent maestro of various Euterpense Societies, Mr. Bach Sentena,”¹⁵ who was one of Clavé’s closest collaborators. Only three years earlier Antoni Font had pushed ahead the creation of the Casino Artesano, “the first neighbourhood entity in the Barceloneta,”¹⁶ founded with the idea of improving conditions in the community. On September 29 of that same 1863, taking advantage of the neighbourhood festival, the choral society had its public presentation under the direction of Manuel Vilardell. They presented a dance and also announced the beginning of classes in a number of subjects, including choral singing. The banner, which was almost as important as the singers themselves, would be made by the workshop of Joan Medina, an embroiderer specialised in this kind of hanging flag.

A year after it was founded, the choir of the Barceloneta participated in the Gran Festival d’Euterpe (Great Euterpe Festival), also known as the Festival of Two Thousand Voices participating under the organization of the Euterpense Association. The purpose of the event was to further knowledge of the activity of the Claverian choral societies. The thirty-four men from the Barceloneta choir performed *Els pescadors* (The Fishermen) and *Una orgia* (An Orgy) on June 5, without winning any of the many prizes being granted. *Els pescadors*, a Catalan fishermen’s song featuring both maritime and amorous imagery composed by Clavé in 1861, has been one of the most performed pieces by the Barceloneta choral societies ever since, and rightly so. Eight years after Great Festi-

val, in 1872 the Fifth Great Festival of Euterpe was held in El Torín, the long disappeared bullring of the Barceloneta. On that occasion, the choir that was in fact representing the maritime neighbourhood was another choral society that had been quite active during the final years of the 19th century: La Perla de la Barceloneta.

The Choral Societies after Clavé

After the death of Josep Anselm Clavé in 1874, the Euterpense Association fell into crisis due to ongoing debates as to the direction the movement should take. The size it had taken on and the arguments over various aspects of its social role made it impossible to keep the movement together. The following years seemed like there were nevertheless positive for the choral socie-

ties in the Barceloneta. There are more of them, and as a consequence, their public presence expands as well. As for their activity, the main function continued to be recreational, and was centred on the organization of dances, concerts and parties, just as Clavé had envisioned. These activities were held at the social club of each of the respective choirs, which normally was a tavern or café. Yet despite being spaces that were not always the most adequate for the activities proposed, they were regulated by sufficiently strict norms with the goal of creating a positive ambience in promoting fraternal bonds between the different members. In order to accomplish this goal, members had to behave in a way that would not be a morally offensive, and with this goal in mind political and social subjects were also prohibited

as discussion material. While at first the only beneficiaries of programmed activity were society members, they were allowed to invite family members and the odd friend, so that their behaviour as well had to be watched over by the member who had invited them.

In spite of having been created under the auspices of Clavé's model, these new choral societies began to forget him. In fact the first choral societies that were called humoristic and began to set out their own identity, which in the long term would determine one of the distinguishing traits of the choral societies in the Barceloneta, emerged just before the end of the century, under the watchful eye of the Claverian choirs. Even so, the mark of Clavé was seen not only on an organizational level, but also in the spirit of coop-



■ A choral society of the Barceloneta has their photograph taken during a trip to the countryside.

SOURCE: ARCHIVE OF THE COORDINATOR OF BARCELONETA CHORAL GROUPS.

eration between society members and with the least favoured in society. In this regard we can cite various examples: a performance done on April 29, 1873, in recognition of the men and women of Puigcerdà who were resisting the Carlist offensive, with the participation of La Fraternidad, amongst other societies;¹⁷ the concert organized at the Casino Artesano of the Barceloneta on July 22, 1882, to collect money for the families affected by a furnace explosion on Amàlia Street;¹⁸ the Christmas festival in benefit of unemployed workers on December 21, 1884, held at the Bon Retiro theatre with the presence of La Nova Australia, turning into a humoristic mass choir of over five hundred singers;¹⁹ a day in solidarity with the victims of the shipwreck of the “Reina Regente”, held on April 7, 1895 in the Palau de les Belles Arts (Palace of Fine Arts), with the participation of the Casino Choir²⁰; or another event in support of the poorest residents of the Gràcia neighbourhood, with the presence of the Casino Choir once more, held on August 15, 1902, in the tent raised at the corner of Passeig de Gràcia and Aragó Street.²¹

The Choral Movement as Participant in the Transformational Project of the Spanish Second Republic

Existing data allows us to state that in no case did a change of government or regime have a substantial affect on the activity of the choral life of the Barceloneta until the Fascist uprising. Having said this, we can observe that the most important political events did end up having an influence on its practices. In the case of the proclamation of the Second Republic the influence does indeed stand out. It is for this reason that, in our analysis of the behaviour of the Barceloneta choir movement during this brief period, we have chosen to leave aside references to the traditional calendar of festivities and holidays, which would continue to be

carried out as in previous years. Here we opt instead to focus on activities more closely tied to the new political situation.

The overall discourse of the choir movement and not only those following Clavé had always emphasized apolitical positions, as in their Rules and Statutes there was always a phrase prohibiting “serious activity in political and social matters.”²² In turn, while it is also true that the choirs can be seen involved in matters that went clearly beyond the strictly musical or cultural domain, it cannot be denied that they had always emphasized mutual support and assistance quite beyond political or party-based positions. Perhaps what should be said about the Catalan choral movement is that in spite of being made up of organizations active above all in the field of music, it was never able or willing to shut itself off from its context, seeking instead to intervene in social reality in favour of what was held to be just, without that stopping them from continuing to carry out their principal task, which was musical. Yet when on April 14, 1931, the Second Republic was proclaimed, the discourse and practices of the choral societies shifted, as would happen in any case with society as a whole.

The first show of explicit support for the new political system was found in an editorial published in *La Aurora*, the official paper of the Federation of Clavé Choirs, just after the Republic was proclaimed. In that time of particular social effervescence the discourse developed by the Federation took a look back in time in search of the guiding principles of its founder, recalling his social status while affirming itself as a working class organization, which meant it was objectively interested in the consolidation of the new legal and political structure. Besides this new political and social context, which was clearly favourable

to the development of its ideological principles, the Claverian choirs began the period of the Republic without the internal tensions of previous decades, allowing them to “recover lost ground when it came to presence on the street, in citizen-initiated or official public events, and with an influence on the social and cultural life of the country.”²³

Although a degree of stability set in after an initial period of uncertainty, events in favour of the Republic were held non-stop. In the first year, the Administration Commission for a commemorative plaque in support of the proclamation of the Catalan Republic organized a series of events on Montjuïc, where we find the presence of Els Pescadors. They performed with the Dalia Barcelonina and the Artística Graciensa, as well as the Orfeó de Llevant, which, under the direction of the maestro Alier, closed the event performing *Cant de la senyera* (Song of the Catalan Flag), *Sota de l'olm* (Beneath the Elm), *L'Hereu Riera* (The Heir Riera), *Bai, bai, bai* and *Nostra Dansa* (Our Dance).²⁴ In the years that followed the proclamation of the Republic was commemorated, “that change of regime in the Spanish state that fills the people with joy after having worn the strangling harness around its neck”,²⁵ bringing “to complete satisfaction the entire organization of the Claverian choirs, inasmuch as they had seen fulfilled one of their main ideas, that of liberty.”²⁶

Despite this new state of things, political and social conflicts persisted. One was related to the difficulty of approving the Statute of Catalonia. One of the best-known manifestations in favour of its approval without modification took place on Sunday, April 24, 1932, with the main player being the Autonomous Centre of Commercial and Industrial Clerks (Centre Auton-

omista de Dependents del Comerç i la Indústria, CADCI), which had called the event. Many associations from around Catalonia gave it their support and were present in the demonstration with their Catalan flags. In representation of the Barceloneta there was the Petit Mar i Platja Choral Society, the Centre Cooperatiu de Pescadors Choral Group and the Orfeo Llevant society.²⁷

The death of the President of the Generalitat (Catalan government) Francesc Macià on December 25, 1933, also awakened in the choral sphere the need to render him homage. This was the aim of the brochure published by the Humorística La Perla Choral Society of the Barceloneta, which featured the portrait of Macià and included the words of a song composed by G. Verneda (Tino) and the maestro M. Moret, entitled *La mort de l'avi* (Death of the Grandfather). The final verses of the song are an indication of their love for the president and their nation: “Still the people do not forget you/ and remembering will cry / Long live

Free Catalonia! /and our granddad Macià!” (*Però el poble no t'oblida, / I recordan-te cridarà: / ¡Visca Catalunya Lliure / i el nostre avi Macià!*)²⁸

The Catalan national day, September 11, would also give rise to interest on the part of the choral societies that has not been appreciated until now. The Commission given the task of organizing the events of the day was made up of representatives from different organizations, with the task of drawing up a program that would revolve around the monument to Rafael de Casanova. It is quite surprising to see the amount of choral societies that went to the monument during the day, usually for the purpose of leaving a floral wreath, while others chose to sing. The Barceloneta was once again present with the participation of Les Gavines and the Orfeo Llevant, who performed the *Hymn to Catalonia* by Sabater and the *Cant del Poble* (Song of the People) by Amadeu Vives.²⁹ Two years later, the same two choirs would participate once again on the same occasion. That time, however, the Orfeo de Llevant changed locations,

going instead to the Fossar de les Moreres (Cemetery of the Mulberry Trees) where, together with La Violeta de Clavé they performed *Els Segadors* (The Harvesters) and *L'Emigrant*, a piece “that the crowd warmly applauded.”³⁰

This bond between various Barceloneta choral societies and political Catalan nationalism did not end there. The fact that the president of Les Gavines, Josep Tomàs i Piera,³¹ belonged to Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (the Republican Left of Catalonia) allows us to observe a few unusual scenes. The first took place on February 27, 1934, when the Mayor of Barcelona was paid a visit by the society's board.³² Two years later, on March 19, 1936, they were to visit the Generalitat, the Catalan governmental palace. That time the entire choir went and was received by President Lluís Companys, with the children performing *Els Segadors*. Afterwards, the president of the society and professors Estivill and August closed the event by offering Companys a bouquet of red carnations.³³

Besides these more explicitly political activities, the choral societies continued to participate in those of a more social nature. Here we might include the festival organized by the Municipal Assistance Committee of District I, “made up of all political factions”,³⁴ in benefit of the district's poor. Held in the tent ceded by the Ateneu Pi i Margall and raised in Francesc Magrinyà Square in the Barceloneta, it featured the participation of the Barceloneta choral societies La Perla, Orfeo Llevant and Les Gavines, amongst others. There was also the event organized by the children's mutual members section (Els Petits Mutualistes) of the Federation of the Catalan Societies of Mutual Support held in the Palau Nacional (National Palace) “in honour of their youngest associates.”³⁵ Another participant was the children's association Agrupació Infantil Gavines i Gavots³⁶ of the Bar-



■ On their return from their Pentecost outing, members of choral societies parade with foodstuffs hanging off their clothes.

SOURCE: ARCHIVE OF THE COORDINATOR OF BARCELONETA CHORAL GROUPS.

celoneta, under the direction of Josep Taxes. Finally we might refer to the event organized on June 21, 1936, in the Gràcia neighbourhood, with the aim of increasing support for a fund to provide lifetime pensions to the elderly in the community.³⁷ The event, which was fully programmed, included a “session of danceable music with mass appeal”³⁸ as performed by Les Gavines children’s dance troupe, and which was broadcast by Radio Barcelona.

With the beginning of the Civil War after the military coup, it was the Les Gavines choral society that made the greatest effort in defending the project of the popular front. An example would be its participation in a benefit festival in support of a fund for the Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias that was organized on Sunday, September 20, 1936, by the Gràcia E. C. sports club, and held at the Guinardó football stadium. The activities, which lasted throughout the day, began at 10 o’clock in the morning with “concerts of Folklore and popular music”³⁹ by the Federation of Folklore Organizations of Catalonia with the collaboration of other institutions. On the same day, the Sarrià Worker’s Centre organized a festival in support of the Anti-Fascist Militias.⁴⁰ Les Gavines participated in this same festival, sharing the stage with other groups. The period of the Republic thus ended in the same way as it had began, with the Catalan choral movement giving its support to the Republic, now at war with Fascism.

Building a New Choral Movement between Fascist Instrumentalization and Independence

The fascist victory in 1939 meant the end of the Catalan choral societies, whether grouped together in the recently founded Federation of Clavé Choirs and Choral Groups or acting on independently of it, as was the

case with the humoristic choral societies, amongst others. In the month of January, the Franco authorities closed down the Federation of Clavé Choirs and Choral Groups, and with this closure the united initiative of Clavé, long desired and so diligently worked for, was cut short, meaning the sudden end of the two hundred choral societies that had belonged to it. This shut-down responded to official ruling 6.001, which stated that the civil governor of the province of Barcelona orders that “the reorganization of said organization is suspended as long as the purging is yet to be completed.”⁴¹ It took until November 3, 1950 for the Spanish state to legalize the Federation of Clavé Choirs once again, and then only under the control of the Syndicated Organization of Education and Leisure. Before this, however, some choirs had restarted their activity, with the limitations of the period present, such as with the Censorship Decree of March 27, 1939, which took out of circulation the works of writers and translators who had been condemned to die or had gone into exile. One of the pieces affected by the censorship was (to give an example) the biography of Josep Anselm Clavé, written by Josep Lleopart.⁴²

In any case, the revival of this complex web of societies would take place slowly, for as historian Pierre Vilar has observed, “if profound crises cause social unrest, prolonged crises wear out all kinds of energies.”⁴³ Furthermore, as the anthropologists Joan Prat and Jesús Contreras have pointed out,⁴⁴ the rupture brought on by the Fascist uprising was one of the two factors leading to the decadence of what we call the *traditional and/or popular*, since the “instauration by force of a political-administrative apparatus, which amongst other things automatically meant the suppression of institutions representing the Catalan nationality”,⁴⁵ had the twin goal of eliminating both

the expressions most strongly pertaining to the overall body of popular classes and to the different nations making up the Spanish state. The other factor, the process of industrial development, had even earlier been causing “a progressive homogenization or uniformity of models of consumption ... models of behaviour within the family unit in different places and media, and relationships between individuals: workplace behaviour, use of leisure, appreciation and spread of access to school education”,⁴⁶ all of which had begun to cause these cultural patterns to shift.

The recovery of the Claverian movement in the Barceloneta during the first years of the Franco government thus was directly conditioned by the political regime itself, as the choirs participated in initiatives organized with the idea of instrumentalizing them for political benefit. These events focussed on expressions of Catalan popular culture that appeared to be more easily assimilated, while “strategically leaving aside their Republican and revolutionary origin so as to put greater emphasis on aspects related to workers’ syndicates and songs like *Glory to Spain*.”⁴⁷ In this way they were restricted to participation in the *caramelles* competitions organized by the Syndicated Organization of Education and Leisure⁴⁸ or the City of Barcelona on Holy Saturday, or to collaborating on the occasion of the centenary of the first choir festival in 1850, in events planned by City Hall and organized by an Official Commission comprised of individuals representing the network of associations in the neighbourhood, together with others belonging to the Falange. The Els Pescadors choral society, which had reorganized itself just a year earlier, participated with the performance of *Cant a la Vinya* (Song to the Vineyards) and *Les flors de maig* (The May Flowers).⁴⁹



■ In the 1980s, the Humorous Choir All i Oli has their photograph taken in front of their centre, with the group banner proudly displayed.

SOURCE: ARCHIVE OF THE COORDINATOR OF BARCELONETA CHORAL GROUPS.

This straightjacketing of the Federation of Clavé Choirs would change over time, as it became more clearly aligned with the dominant National Catholicism of the time. An indication of this historically unique shift can be seen with the strengthening of ties to the Church. The activities related to the Catholic Church that most stand out were the Gatherings at Montserrat, which became annual events that the Claverian choral societies could not miss.

Even so, the most explicit collaboration of the Claverian choral societies with the fascist regime was their participation in a few events meant to welcome the head of state and of the government Francisco Franco. On May 13, 1960, they had planned to send out an expedition from the Federation of Clavé Choirs to Portugal, though “circumstances of national interest,”⁵⁰ that is, the arrival of “His Excellency the Head of State General

Franco and of the Government of the Nation”⁵¹ made them change their minds and postpone the trip. They held that it was better to stay in Barcelona to deal with “any order that could come to us related to rendering homage to the General.”⁵² The order did indeed come, and on the night of May 21 they responded “with the greatest of success ... gathering five thousand choir members together in the historical Plaza de San Jaime to perform *Glory to Spain*.”⁵³ The second incident took place in June, 1966. The reception took place at the entrance to Barcelona on the Diagonal, at the Pedralbes Palace. After a long wait in the sun, the dictator finally arrived and the choir, ready for their moment, performed *L'Empordà*. When they finished, the general clasped his hands together in appreciation as the singers’ waved their traditional Catalan hats in the air.⁵⁴

During the years of the Franco dictatorship the presence of humoristic

choral societies also diminished. As they were accustomed to seeing all aspects of life from a critically mocking perspective, it took them longer to be revived, and the process was more difficult than for the choirs rooted in the Claverian tradition. Those that did try to stay active had to put up with the intrusions of a regime that had chosen to take control over any grassroots initiative in order to stretch out its own lifespan. The Els Tranquils choral society ended up being the subject of an investigation whose final report from September 17, 1949, stated that “it is a choir, which although at this time has a board of directors that is not known to be politically active, meets in a place known as Bar “MANEL” that does not have a very fine reputation in the moral sense and in the political sense, having clients from amongst the people of the port and fishermen, the majority being undesirable types who do not agree with the Regime, so that the Choir in question is not

particularly trustworthy and perhaps in the future will be the pretext for the organization of any kind of activity, given the type of people associating there.”⁵⁵ So that in spite of not being able to accuse the members of Els Tranquils of anything in particular, the report raises a shadow of suspicion over them, their usual meeting place and those sharing it with them for the simple fact of being “people from the port and fishermen” (we might wonder what was to be expected from a bar in the Barceloneta), who without any proof were mostly considered to be “undesirable types who do not agree with the Regime”. This is a clear sign of the persecution and vulnerability of its citizens, and helps to explain the prudence with which the humoristic choral societies sought to revive their activities.

The Revival of the Choral Movement in the Barceloneta

On November 20, 1975 Spanish head of state Francisco Franco died. After a short period of convulsion, the regime began a timid reformation process while the working class movements took to the streets together to call for freedom(s). The joyful burst of the masses, calling out for what they had long desired, spread throughout the country; in the Barceloneta neighbourhood as well the choral societies, under the direction of new individuals and social agents, took it upon themselves to rebuild the infrastructure of associations they had previously been part of. The previous network had been made up of centres (known as *ateneus* in Catalan) and clubs for the general population, workers, Republicans and Catalanists who “had become the veri-

table leaders of the civil and cultural uprising in Catalonia since the end of the 19th century”, being recognized as “a fundamental expression of mass identity upon which the cultural life of the country was organized.”⁵⁶ As is well known, amongst the main factors in this awakening were the neighbourhood associations, having not only worked for the improvement of daily reality in close proximity in difficult times, but who at that time, with the death of Franco, had taken a degree of political initiative by calling the first demonstration for political amnesty.⁵⁷ They also involved themselves in the revival of the historical network of Catalan associations independent from political power when it came to setting holidays. In the case of the Barceloneta Neighbourhood Association, one of the main tasks undertaken was



At the end of the 1970s, the Lozano family, members of the Humoristic Choral Society Els Afortunats, dressed up to parade through the neighbourhood. SOURCE: POPULAR PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION OF THE BARCELONETA.

to revive the choral societies, an effort that focussed on the creation of two choirs meant to join those that had been revived even under the Franco regime. These new choirs were the Coral Gavina, the first mixed gender choir in the Barceloneta in over a hundred years, and the Rosa dels Vents, a children's choir which would immediately have sixty participating members.

If this was what community members organized in the neighbourhood association were up to, those outside of that association would prove to be equally active. Little by little, the number of humorous choral societies grew as well, reviving Pentecost as their main festive event with the new name of the Choir Festival. In any case, some of what we might call the fundamental characteristics of the humorous choral societies were still changing. What had once been one of the identifying

features of these organizations, namely their humorous choral pieces, had been driven into silence after forty years of dictatorship; such songs had disappeared from festive events, and were no longer considered essential features of them. If anyone wanted their humorous choral society to sing something, they would have to look back into the past to revive practices that had been dampened by sheer force.

Apart from this activity, once the festivity had been reawakened, little by little some of the traditions were modified as well, being adapted to the interests of new participants and social demands. Thus in 1993, for example, a group of women took the initiative to do away with their decidedly secondary role so as to become active participants in the festivities, creating the first of many female choral societies, La Sirena. That said, not everyone has looked favour-

ably upon these and other changes of recent years. This is because the choral movement in the Barceloneta has a mass, working class following that is not the case with many of the festive events in Catalonia. It is precisely because it is alive and that residents claim it as their own that the Choir Festival enlivens emotions and arouses debate amongst those who, being so deeply involved, might fear that any changes will end up killing it off, in spite of apparently being so widely successful. ■

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Press
El Metrónomo
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Municipal Archive of the District of Gràcia
Popular Archive of the Barceloneta

NOTES

- 1 *Paisos Catalans*, a term describing the Catalan-speaking territories of Catalonia, Valencia, the Balearic Islands, Andorra and the southern French region of Roussillon (Translator's note).
- 2 Vinyes, Ricard La presència ignorada. La cultura comunista a Catalunya (1840-1931). Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1989, p. 89.
- 3 Idem.
- 4 Albert Garcia Balañà, "Ordre industrial i transformació cultural a la Catalunya de mitjans segle XIX: a propòsit de Joseph Anselm Clavé i l'associacionisme coral", in *Recerques* (1996), no. 33, p. 122.
- 5 Eva Serra i Puig, "Un programa de cultura popular", in *Serra d'Or*, December 1974, p. 75.
- 6 Two of the most interesting and contrasting interpretations of the meaning of the choral societies conceived by Clavé are found in Garcia Balañà, op. cit., and Vinyes, op. cit.
- 7 Under the auspices of the City of Barcelona, which did not look favourably on the transformational project of Clavé, Joan and Pere Tolosa founded the *Orfeo Català* (1853), with a more conservative social proposal that was closer to the mindset of the authorities.
- 8 *El Metrònom*, no. 8, March 1, 1863, p.2.
- 9 Caramelles is the term given to the choral singing of popular religious songs during Easter, with the choirs often going door to door (Translator's note).
- 10 The inclusion of the steam-powered engine in industrial processes led to the prohibition of factories inside the city walls due to the dangers they could bring with them. The *Barceloneta*, which was outside the walls, thus became one of the areas chosen to place factories with the new technology, given that it was near the city and the port. Besides this, the train line from Mataró crossed just above the maritime neighbourhood.
- 11 Idem.
- 12 Research Group in Ethnography of Public Spaces, Catalan Institute of Anthropology, Manuel Delgado, coordinator, *Carrer, festa i revolta. Els usos simbòlics de l'espai públic a Barcelona (1951-2000)*. Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, Departament de Cultura, 2003, p. 54.
- 13 Amades, Joan *Costumari català*. Barcelona: Edicions Salvat, 1984, pp. 879-880.
- 14 Delgado, Manuel *La festa a Catalunya avui*. Capellades: Editorial Barcanova, SA, 1992, pp. 39-40.
- 15 *El Metrònom*, no. 28, July 19, 1863, p. 4.
- 16 Quim Larrea, coordinator, *Celebració del ¼ de mil·lenni de la Barceloneta (1753-2003)*, Port Authority of Barcelona with the support of Foment Ciutat Vella, Barcelona, 2004, p. 43.
- 17 Carbonell i Guberna, Jaume Josep Anselm Clavé i el naixement del cant coral a Catalunya (1850-1874). Capellades: Edicions Galerada, 2000, p. 573.
- 18 *La Vanguardia*, July 24, 1882, p. 3.
- 19 *La Vanguardia*, December 21, 1884, p. 5.
- 20 *La Vanguardia*, April 7, 1895, p. 7.
- 21 *La Vanguardia*, August 14, 1902, pp. 2-3.
- 22 Statutes of the *Agrupació Choral Humorística El Ganxo*.
- 23 Carbonell i Guberna, Jaume La societat coral *Euterpe* fundada per Clavé. *El Prat de Llobregat: Rúbrica Editorial*, 2007, p. 46.
- 24 *La Vanguardia*, December 13, 1932, p. 10.
- 25 *La Aurora*, March 1933, Year XLVI, no. 3, pp. 3-4.
- 26 Idem.
- 27 *La Vanguardia*, April 26, 1932, p. 6.
- 28 Popular Archive of the *Barceloneta*, box 012.
- 29 *La Vanguardia*, September 10, 1932, p. 5.
- 30 *La Vanguardia*, September 12, 1934, pp. 4-5.
- 31 Josep Tomàs i Piera (*Barcelona 1900 – Guadalajara, Mexico, 1976*). Trained as a lawyer, he joined *Acció Catalana*, a political party emerging out of the *Lliga Regionalista* on the initiative of its young intellectuals, who were disappointed with the party of Francesc Cambó. Tomàs i Piera participated in the local section of the *Barceloneta*, which was officially presented in March 1923 with the name *Joventut Nacionalista de la Barceloneta*. Finally, he would end up as a member of the *Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC)*, a party he would be elected to the Spanish Congress for in 1933 and 1936. He would be Minister of Work, Health and Social Prevision and Vice-President of the Congress in the government of Largo Caballero in September, 1936.
- 32 *La Aurora*, July 1934, Year XLVII, no. 7.
- 33 *La Vanguardia*, March 20, 1936, p. 6.
- 34 *La Vanguardia*, September 28, 1934, p. 6.
- 35 *La Vanguardia*, September 29, 1934, p. 7.
- 36 *Gavines* and *Gavots* could be the name given to the children's section of *Les Gavines*, although at times it is also called the *Children's Section of Les Gavines*.
- 37 *La Vanguardia*, June 7, 1936, p. 9.
- 38 *La Vanguardia*, June 21, 1936, p. 11.
- 39 *La Vanguardia*, September 18, 1936, p. 6.
- 40 *La Vanguardia*, September 20, 1936, p. 6.
- 41 Solé i Sabaté, Josep Maria and Villarroya, Joan *Cronologia de la repressió de la llengua i la cultura catalanes (1936-1975)*. Barcelona: Curial Edicions Catalanes, 1993, p. 84.
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- 45 *Ibid.*, pp. 135-138.
- 46 Idem.
- 47 Joan Soler i Amigó, director, *Tradicionari: enciclopèdia de la cultura popular de Catalunya*, Barcelona *Enciclopèdia Catalana and Generalitat de Catalunya*, 2005-2008, v. 7, p. 62.
- 48 The *Caramelles Contest* that had begun during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera and was maintained during the Second Republic was cut short during the Civil War, to be picked up again by the *Syndicated Organization of Education and Leisure* in 1943.
- 49 *La Vanguardia*, August 25, 1950, p. 10.
- 50 *La Aurora*, July 1960, p. 3.
- 51 Idem.
- 52 Idem.
- 53 Idem.
- 54 *La Vanguardia*, June 23, 1966, p. 7.
- 55 Archive of the Civil Government of Barcelona, Registry no. 6542.
- 56 Solé i Sabaté, Josep Maria and Villarroya, Joan *Cronologia de la repressió de la llengua i la cultura catalanes (1936-1975)*, Barcelona: Curial Edicions Catalanes, 1993, p. 26.
- 57 On Saturday, February 1, 1976, the Assembly of Catalonia, the unified *Anti-Franco* political institution in Catalonia, used the legal coverage and hard-won prestige of the *Federation of Neighbourhood Associations of Barcelona* to call a demonstration in the centre of Barcelona, with the support of thousands of people.

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