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Zarzuela and the Rise of the Labour Movement in Spain

Zarzuela—Spanish lyric theatre—traces its extraordinary popularity on the Iberian Peninsula to the reign of Isabel II (1844-68). Thereafter it never lost its public appeal. In the nineteenth century cultural commentators debated its debt to seventeenth century antecedents. Notwithstanding differing opinions on this, clearly its modern form emerged from Spanish musicians' attempts to found a new national opera. When they failed to popularise a genre entirely in music, what remained was the zarzuela, which has both singing and spoken dialogue. This article focuses on the social nature of musicians' hopes for a national opera; the way this arises from their difficult material situation in the face of competition from foreign music and artists, and the politics of early Spanish liberalism. After documenting the depth of artists' concern with material life and the social language of their plan for action it suggests that we view the rise of the mature zarzuela in the light of Spain's incipient labour movement. By doing so we in turn gain insight into an important aesthetic feature of zarzuela. Michael Schinasi is an Associate Professor of Hispanic Studies in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures and has a particular research interest in performance and the theatre industry in nineteenth-century Spain.

Keywords: labour movement, musicians, national opera, Spain, zarzuela

Manuel Núñez de Arenas and Manuel Tuñón de Lara describe the historic situation of the mid-nineteenth century Iberian Peninsula as one in which “La edad media aún gravitaba sobre los campos de España (the middle ages continued to weigh on the Spanish countryside)”¹. Bourgeois manners, however, also made their way into the fabric of society, especially in urban centres. This was noticeable in changes that took place in cultural life and the entertainment industry. The emergence of Spanish Romanticism is their most studied feature, but there are others which had their origins in the eighteenth century. New forms of sociability and arenas for them contributed to their advance: aristocratic homes hosted socially

mixed gatherings, which included a sophisticated bourgeoisie, to engage in cultured dialogue.² Moreover, these venues for sociability had their popular extension in the new cafés that opened.³ Such public places for polite conversation, however, could be a disappointment. This is what made them the grist for the enlightened criticism of Leandro Fernández de Moratín—an inveterate café goer—at the end of the eighteenth century, or Mariano José de Larra, one of Spain’s great Romantic figures in the 1830s. They artistically express their distress at the failure of Spain’s enlightenment movement to produce a well-mannered and literate bourgeoisie that would become the café’s clientele.⁴

For some eighteenth and nineteenth century commentators the entertainment that catered to this public was likewise culturally impoverished. Moratín complained about theatre’s pandering tastelessness. Larra, who sought to make a living from his pen, suffered social alienation and frustration as he observed the low cultural level of his target audience. This turns into romantic anguish as he views it as an unyielding, national historic failure. For a limited number of other commentators the nation’s unenlightenment was on view in events like the bullfight, which increased in popularity in the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century. In 1849-50, when the government taxed the gate of entertainments around the Peninsula, the dimension of its hold on the Spanish people is clear. The records of these payments from the provinces to the central government show that no other moneymaking public diversion came close to bullfighting. Its income only declined in the summer. In Seville, a great bullfighting centre, for example, its revenues progressively diminished in June, July, and August, in inverse relationship to the increasing heat of the summer sun. Still, the income from bullfights remained greater than that of any other public spectacle.⁵

Notwithstanding commentators’ complaints about the deficiencies of theatre and other forms of entertainment, there also was innovation, though the self-fashioned cultural elite of the period did not necessarily applaud its quality. Even the bullfight mutated into something unusual when in 1849 it joined forces with the creatures from an ambulatory zoo to become “battles of savage beasts.” A display of exotic animals that came to Madrid fired an impresario’s romantic imagination. He envisioned ferocious animals in a bullring tearing into each other, as if to bring to life a Delacroix painting. The main event was a clash with a Spanish bull and like the rest of the spectacle it proved to be a dismal failure.⁶ There were also technological developments, like those that made possible innovative uses of light and shadow for public diversions.⁷ Important changes in the generic makeup of theatre took place, as well. For example, old neoclassic tragedy virtually disappeared, replaced by popular historical dramas. Untraditional new types of brief theatre, like the “disparate cómico, (comic nonsense),” made their advance on the nineteenth century stage.⁸ In general, theatre’s popularity surged and in metropolitan centres, attending performances became routine, like watching an evening of television today.⁹ Throughout Spain a small but vocal public of young and old theatre enthusiasts united in their respective groups to form lyceums and theatre societies, and call for more performances.¹⁰ In increasing numbers young people also wanted to write for or act in the theatre, something the government did not discourage.¹¹ By 1838 there were new theatre

decrees regarding intellectual property rights. They were not successful, however, in achieving their goal of protecting an author's financial interests, or in turning dramatists into entrepreneurs of the stage and promoting a life in the arts for the most talented members of society.¹² Amidst this activity surrounding theatre, municipalities around the Peninsula built new venues for performances or remodeled old ones. As cities grew, these buildings were their jewels; they were a source of civic pride and constructed in prominent locations.¹³

The rise of the Isabelline zarzuela, arguably the most popular form of performance art that emerged in nineteenth century Spain, belongs to this history of cultural novelty, modest though it may have been. It is the mature musical theatre that authors and composers cultivated during the reign of Isabel II (1844-68). A developmental demarcation point for it is the first "blockbuster" show of the genre in 1851, *Jugar con fuego (Playing with Fire)*, by the dramatist Ventura de la Vega and the composer Francisco Asenjo Barbieri.¹⁴ What distinguishes this form of musical theatre from traditional opera is its combination of singing and dialogue. We know of it in two iterations; as the lengthier *zarzuela grande* (high zarzuela) and the briefer *género chico* (light zarzuela). These names should not necessarily suggest that the second is artistically a less sophisticated entertainment form. In both cases the Spanish people responded warmly to this kind of lyric theatre. Even today it attracts enthusiastic audiences, though one may anecdotally note a graying of its public. Outside of the Spanish-speaking world the genre is often considered the equivalent of English language comic opera. Its stories, however, were not always comic. One thinks, for example, of the *zarzuela grande*, *Curro Vargas* (1898) with music by Ruperto Chapí and libretto by Joaquín Dicenta and Antonio Paso y Cano about a jealous lover who murders his rival. It is true, however, that the zarzuela often deals with simple love stories similar to those we see in modern musical comedies: young man and woman are in love; they have a falling out; interwoven humorous episodes complicate the plot; the hero and heroine then resolve the problem and the comedy ends in harmony and song. The spectacle is enhanced by dance, which like its music, draws from forms we traditionally associate with Spain, like the *fandango*, *jota*, *seguidillas* or *sevillanas*. The genre's stories and characters especially appealed to the masses, but all social classes enjoyed zarzuelas. It is common to think of the genre as especially representative of the values of Madrid's working class neighbourhoods though compositions were also set outside the nation's capital and have aristocratic characters.

Even as the zarzuela rapidly was extending its popularity in the nineteenth century, its practitioners and admirers gave us their evaluations through their critical writing about it. Typically, these commentaries note that the zarzuela takes its name from the entertainment performed in the royal palace used for hunting during the reign of Phillip IV (1621-65). It stood among *zarzas*, brambles. Among the genre's earliest cultivators was the great Baroque dramatist, Calderón de la Barca. Ultimately, however, these commentators question the extent to which their contemporary zarzuela was truly indebted to the lyric theatre of Calderón's period. Among other things, they wonder if its early development and history represented a failed attempt

to create a Spanish national opera, or if the zarzuela of their own day really is an elaboration of the old genre. For us, their writing does not sufficiently explore the general historical and material circumstances under which the genre was produced and why it developed during Isabel II's reign. They clearly sense the importance of this. They do not, however, possess the historical perspective on their own period to more extensively pursue what will become a major theme in the present study: how the rise of the mature zarzuela and the social thinking about the material situation of musicians that motivated it coincides with the emergence of the Spanish labour movement. We can here fill some of the gaps in this story and by doing so better understand how its history influenced the nature of its texts.

Among the causes for the rise of Isabelline lyric theatre according to today's critics is the nationalism of its early creators. Ana María López Freire and Pilar Espín in a video introduction to the genre, speak of its early productions in the eighteenth century as a reaction to the Spanish public's enthusiasm for foreign musical theatre. Italian opera companies and artists became enormously popular in Spain and this continued into the nineteenth century.¹⁵ For Antonio Peña y Goñi, one of Spanish lyric theatre's great 19th century historians, this is "la agitada época del furor filarmónico (the tumultuous period of philharmonic frenzy)."¹⁶ The public's delight in Italian operas never waned and its pre-Isabelline Spanish counterpart languished. Peña y Goñi writes,

monopolizándolo todo la locura por la Ópera italiana y los cantantes italianos el teatro [lírico] español yacía entonces en el más deplorable olvido, abandonado, despreciado, envilecido por los que se postraban a los pies de una prima donna o se pegaban de mogicones, por un apreciable tenor (on account of the monopoly of the madness for Italian opera and Italian singers Spanish [lyric] theatre was beaten down into the most deplorable neglect, abandoned, disdained, debased by those people who lay prostrate at the feet of a[n Italian] prima donna, and who beat each other up for an admired [Italian] tenor).¹⁷

From the eighteenth century into the first third of the nineteenth century, Spanish musicians sought to ride the coattails of foreign opera's popularity and wrote their own compositions in Italian. Once again, Peña y Goñi expressively comments on this development:

abandonado y despreciado el teatro nuestro, apagado el último destello de nuestra nacionalidad lírica, ¿quién pensaba en los maestros españoles? ¿Quién pensaba en la música española? ... los maestros de aquella época ... no eran otra cosa que imitadores entusiastas de Rossini (our theatre, abandoned and disdained, the last flicker of our national lyric snuffed out, who gave any consideration to Spanish *maestros*? Who thought about Spanish music? ... the composers of that period ... were nothing more than enthusiastic imitators of Rossini).¹⁸

For him, these artistic endeavours were mostly disappointments. He writes:

esas óperas murieron porque debían morir porque nacían de tuberculosis y porque sucumbían al poco tiempo consumidas por la tisis de la imitación (those operas died because they should have died, because they were born of tuberculosis and because they succumbed shortly afterward, wasted by the consumption of imitation.)¹⁹

In the wake of their failures and difficulties in producing Italian operas Spanish musicians turned their thoughts to the creation of their own national opera. As Espín Templado and Freire López note, they attempted to graft a new lyric theatre onto a Spanish tradition dating back to the seventeenth century.²⁰ While some musicians wished to make the national opera a new type of musical theatre, related to but different from zarzuela, one of the masters of nineteenth century Spanish music, Francisco Asenjo Barbieri, disagreed. He believed the emerging zarzuela of his day had deep roots in Spain's musical past, and considered it an artful expression of the country's national character. If it was not the new, mature national opera, at least it represented an important stage in its creation, notwithstanding its combination of dialogue and singing, which distinguished it from opera. In a short treatise on zarzuela he states:

Me parece que la zarzuela ... es, por decirlo así, el escalón para llegar a la ópera [nacional], y aun ella es la ópera misma (It seems to me that the zarzuela ... is, to put it this way, the stepping stone to the [national] opera, and is even the opera itself.)²¹

Here, he contradicts the opinion of another nineteenth century Spanish musician, Rafael Hernando. In 1864 Hernando proposed to Queen Isabel II the establishment of a Royal Academy of Music. Among other things, he claimed this new body would promote the founding of a national opera, which he distinguished from the zarzuela:

la Ópera nacional es el espectáculo más importante, moral y artísticamente considerado. La zarzuela por su género esencialmente cómico no puede dar una justa idea de las ventajas que de aquella habríamos de reportar (the national Opera is morally and artistically considered the most important entertainment. The zarzuela, on account of its essentially comic genre cannot give a fair idea of the benefits that we [the nation] would reap from it).²²

Peña y Goñi takes a position in some regards similar to, but still different from Barbieri and Hernando. Hernando sought a national opera formally like its Italian counterpart, entirely sung, but imbued with a Spanish national spirit. Spanish musicians would never achieve this. Instead, they produced the zarzuela, which like Barbieri's lyric theatre, was both sung and spoken. Peña y Goñi in some of his thinking reminds us of Barbieri. But unlike the great composer who also admired the novelty of the lyric theatre of his day, Peña y Goñi considered the Isabelline zarzuela a form

of entertainment more profoundly new and complex than its earlier manifestation; he emphatically calls it, in its own right, an original and authentic national opera. He pinpoints the specific moment of its origin in the premiere of a zarzuela with music by Hernando:

creo que puede, es más, que debe fijarse el origen de la zarzuela en la zarzuela en dos actos *Colegiales y soldados* de los Sres. Pina y Lumbreras con música de D. Rafael Hernando, estrenada el 21 de Marzo de 1849 en el [Teatro del] Instituto (I believe one can, and what is more, one should ascribe the origin of the zarzuela to the zarzuela in two acts *Colegiales y soldados* by Señores Pina and Lubreras with music by Don Rafael Hernando, premiered on March 21, 1849 in the [Teatro del] Instituto.)²³

He concludes that by 1856, with the opening of a theatre specifically for the zarzuela—Madrid's Teatro de la Zarzuela—the creation of an entirely new genre was complete. This was the mature zarzuela, which Peña y Goñi now calls Spanish Comic Opera:

teníamos música propia, teníamos nacionalidad musical, acabábamos de realizar un acto sin precedentes en la historia de la música dramática española ... Habíamos creado un nuevo género (we had our own music, we had musical nationality, we had just taken an action without precedent in the history of Spanish dramatic music ... We had created a new genre.)²⁴

What is apparent in the statements of each of these writers, notwithstanding their different positions with regard to the relationship between the national opera and zarzuela, is that in nineteenth century Spain there was a conscious, willful attempt to create a new lyric genre. Ventura de la Vega, Barbieri's frequent collaborator, makes this clear as a key contributor to the national theatre reforms the Queen decreed in 1849. As part of this effort the government would license playhouses all around the nation to perform a single genre of theatre, and thus avoid competition. Vega speaks of a novel lyric genre, still under construction, when he considers how musical theatre would fit into this scheme and what this new form should be called:

En vez de ópera cómica creo que debería decirse ópera española, porque cómo se fija el género en un arte del que nada hay; ni música, ni cantantes, salvo alguna pequeñísima escepción? (Instead of comic opera I believe that it probably should be spoken of as Spanish opera because how can we attribute a genre to an art of which there is nothing, neither music, nor singers, except for a very small exception).²⁵

By 1848, when discussion of these theatre reforms began, the new lyric genre was still just a project under construction.²⁶ Even its name was not definite. Both the Spanish national opera as a type of musical theatre that was completely sung, and

the contemporaneous zarzuela, which remained when the former did not materialize can thus be described as blueprint genres.

The nationalist sentiment that previous writers on the zarzuela have well noted fueled this project. Another important factor that made it possible was the rise of new associations which in a spirit of solidarity and shared interests, brought together musicians, together with painters and sculptors, men and women of the theatre, and writers. Among the most important of these associations were the Ateneo Científico, Literario y Artístico de Madrid (1835), the Liceo Artístico y Literario (1837), and the Instituto Español (1839). Other notable ones around mid-century included El Museo Lírico, the Academia Filarmónica Matritense, La Unión, La Venus, La Talía, El Numen, El Parnaso, and El Centro Artístico y Literario.²⁷ María Aurelia Díez Huerga notes that the Instituto Español was an excellent “laboratory” for the performance of works by the artists who served its educational mission. Moreover, “aparte de operas, fue punto de lanzamiento del repertorio decimonónico por excelencia, la zarzuela (aside from operas it was a launching site for the nineteenth century repertoire par excellence, the zarzuela.)”²⁸

María Encina Cortizo, who along with Díez Huerga and other Spanish musicologists has done outstanding work on these institutions, describes them as,

sociedades burguesas, instructivas, recreativas y artístico-musicales que junto con el salón romántico constituyen los principales espacios para el desarrollo de la música en la nueva sociedad [liberal] (bourgeois educational, recreational and artistic-musical societies which together with the romantic salon constitute the principal spaces for the development of music in the new [liberal] society).²⁹

We can furthermore speak of them as spiritual “homes” for artists who experienced great material difficulties. Their individual struggles to earn a living with their music are documented in Peña y Goñi's biographies of the people who worked to create a national opera and ultimately gave Spain its mature zarzuela. Likewise, the music periodical, *La Iberia Musical*, for example, began its second year of existence in 1843 with an article titled “Estado deplorable de nuestros comprofesores (The Deplorable State of our Fellow Musicians).” It speaks of the “miserias de que se hallan rodeados beneméritos artistas (misereries with which well respected artists find themselves surrounded)” and continues:

Doloroso nos es el que en un país donde hay tantos elementos de vida para las artes, donde contamos con una numerosa juventud ardiente y decidida, se vean las primeras abandonadas y los últimos desatendidos. Infinita correspondencia hemos recibido en estos últimos días de maestros de capilla y organistas de varias catedrales y colegiatas, en que nos suplican con lágrimas en los ojos miremos por su situación precaria y miserable, por una existencia que sostienen milagrosamente, y porque se ven próximos a bajar al sepulcro sin que el gobierno les eche una mirada de compasión. (It is painful

for us that in a country where there are so many resources that favor the arts, where we count on a numerous, ardent and decided youth, the first find themselves abandoned and the second disregarded. We have received infinite correspondence in recent days from choirmasters and the organists of various cathedrals and churches, in which they beg us with tears in their eyes that we look out for their precarious and miserable situation, on account of an existence they miraculously sustain, and because they see themselves near to the grave without the government casting a glance of compassion on them.)

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The article's author, Joaquín Espín y Guillén, a musician and co-founder of *La Iberia Musical*, especially takes note of the unemployment of church musicians. He attributes responsibility for this to government attacks on religious institutions:

esos destinos creados para premio del talento y del saber no han sido respetados por los gobiernos de nuestros últimos tiempos echándose como lobos hambrientos sobre las rentas del clero ... (those positions created as an award for talent and knowledge have not been respected by recent governments, which throw themselves like hungry wolves upon the income of the clergy).³¹

He refers to the attitude toward the church that Spain's earliest liberal governments adopted for ideological reasons and as well to finance their defence during the Carlist Civil War (1836-40). Espín y Guillén laments the effects of government disentail or land reform measures. Díez Huerga writes:

una de las jugadas clave fue la confiscación de la propiedades eclesiásticas ... y su venta en pública subasta. Se procedió al cierre de conventos y la supresión de comunidades religiosas que no prestaban servicios sociales (one of its [the government's] key moves was the confiscation of ecclesiastical properties ... and their sale at public auction. They proceeded to the closure of convents and the suppression of religious communities that did not provide social services).³²

Their experience of unemployment due to the government's policy toward the church drove musicians to seek other arenas, such as cafes and theatres, in which to exercise their talents. They still had difficulty however, as a result of the "furor filarmónico," the Italian "opera fever," that gripped the nation. They could not compete with it. Thus, while the cultural societies and associations of the nineteenth century were driven by national pride and a desire to promote "Spanishness" in the arts, something less altruistic also was at play. They wished to improve Spanish arts in order to attract the public to performance halls and in this way create new employment opportunities for artists.

Three documents—letters directed to Queen Isabel II—housed in the Spanish National Historic Archive confirm this. They shed light on how musicians sought to resolve their struggle with material life, and what is of most interest is the emergent social consciousness they demonstrate. Perhaps not by coincidence, they are from the year 1847, just months before the beginning of the revolutionary period outside Spain in 1848, and when one of the nation's most important cultural associations, the Instituto Español, enters what Díez Huerga calls a period of stagnation. Two musicians, Basilio Basili and Mario Martín, wrote the first letter, dated September 15, on behalf of “varios compositores ilustrados en el arte de la música para cuyo engradecimiento hemos reunido hoy día nuestros esfuerzos (a group of composers well educated in the art of music for the glory of which we have today united our efforts).”³³ Especially noteworthy is that while these petitioners to the Queen were among the nation's musicians most dedicated to the cultivation of an ideal fine art, they here make scant appeal to questions of beauty, the grandeur of culture, or its “civilizing” qualities, which figure commonly in the cultural writing of the period. Instead, they proceed immediately to their concern for music as a vocation: “solo diremos de paso que la música en España no ha llegado a ser una profesión productiva ni una carrera (we will only say in passing that music in Spain has not become a productive profession nor a career).”

They share the generalized view in their profession that this failure results from government attacks on religious institutions and foreign competition. The musicians write:

La reforma intoducida en la sociedad con la supresión de una multitud de instituciones religiosas ha sido para la música causa de sumo perjuicio, pues es indudable que a la sombra de aquellas vivía y se perpetuaba (the reform introduced in society with the suppression of a great number of religious institutions has been extremely damaging to music, since there is no doubt that it [music] lived and sustained itself protected by them).

Moreover, they claim that foreigners have invaded performance halls, to which the Spanish public should be drawn. They suggest that Spanish culture will suffer from foreign influence. The Queen's petitioners wished to preserve the Spanish national character in the arts, but they also wanted to protect their own vocational interests. They state that the invasion of foreigners was bad for Spanish musicians because it damaged their reputation and consequently perpetuated their economic misery. They seem to recognize what Peña y Goñi spoke of as their failure to successfully imitate Italian opera.

As they close their letter of petition on behalf of the group they represent, the writers request the concession of the Teatro de la Cruz, one of Madrid's two historic theatres. As impresarios they will offer the public national lyric drama—that is, a national opera. They leave little doubt that aside from the promotion of nationalism, musicians wanted to cultivate the public's taste for a genre, which, as it increased in popularity, would provide them with employment, and a secure income.

The writers of the September 15 petition conclude by promising that if the government makes the Teatro de la Cruz available to them, in addition to lyric drama, the theatre's administration will also include a notable man of letters who will oversee the offering of non-musical theatre. They state: “se promete a hacer cuanto previene el decreto con respecto a dramas y comedias ... (we promise to fulfill all of the provisions of the decree with respect to dramas and comedies).” Here they are speaking of the royal decree governing the nation's theatres that a committee under the direction of the Minister of the Interior, Antonio Benavides was still formulating. This ultimately became the Royal Decree of 1849.³⁴ As Antoine Le Duc has noted, the Benavides theatre regulations troubled musicians because they feared that within their terms the Queen would not be able adequately to support a national opera. Ultimately the Royal Decree of 1849, which replaced the Benavides regulations before they went into effect, placed restrictions on the genres theatres could produce and taxed their income. This was detrimental to smaller venues around the country, such as the performance halls of the cultural associations in which musicians participated, and which had become theatres.³⁵

In a second letter to the Queen, dated in December 1847, some of the most important artists of the period again anticipated her government's failure to address their professional concerns in the pending theatre reforms. In this new petition they speak of:

un nuevo reglamento de Teatro, en el cual no solo no se toma en consideración la existencia de la Ópera Española, sino que se proponen al Gobierno de V.M. algunas cláusulas que destruirían hasta las probabilidades de su instalación ... (a new Theatre Regulation, in which Spanish Opera is not only not taken into consideration, but which proposes to the Government of Your Majesty some clauses that would destroy even the possibility of its installation ...)

The document is noteworthy for the clarity with which they showed their vested vocational stake in promoting a national opera, and also for the social consciousness on behalf of their fellow musicians that we begin to see. According to the writers of the appeal, the new theatre regulations, in the state they currently were rumoured to be, deprived the country of

un espectáculo ya necesario en los países civilizados y necesario además al Estado pues sin embargo de perjudicar una clase numerosa poniéndola en la imposibilidad de ejercer su profesión y lastimando asimismo el decoro nacional, se protege la existencia de la Ópera estrangera que extrae anualmente cuantiosas sumas de la Nación Española (an entertainment now necessary in civilized countries and moreover necessary to the State since besides doing harm to a numerous class [of people] making it impossible for it to exercise its profession thus wounding the decorum of the nation, [the new theatre decree] supports the existence of foreign Opera which extracts substantial sums from the Spanish Nation).

The writers thus present themselves to the Queen on behalf of the material interests of the whole “class” of theatre practitioners, who face a problem that has an economic impact on the nation in general. They conclude by asking not to be left out of the deliberations then under way as the government prepared the Royal Organic Theatre Decree of 1849. In addition, similar to the petitioners in September 1847, these musicians present the Queen with a proposal for founding an institution for national opera, a “Proyecto de Organización del Teatro de la Ópera Española (Plan for the Organization of a Spanish Opera Theatre)” which a society of *maestros* will direct.

A third letter, dated November 19, 1847 is yet another appeal to the Queen by the musician, Basilio Basili, only two months after his first one. He now speaks for a “society” which he names, El Porvenir Artístico (The Future of the Arts). The sociological concerns we find in the other letters are even more pronounced here, as is the author’s view of musicians as a “class.” While in the first half of the nineteenth century in Spain this word does not have the same broad implications that social class has today, it still reflected a social stratification and started to express a relationship between individuals and society by membership in a group based upon his or her labour.³⁶ The most important element of the document begins when Basili complains about the arts never having existed on their own terms and the lack of social cohesion among artists:

no habiendo tenido nunca las artes vida propia, la suerte de los artistas ha sido desventajosa, dependiente, poco decorosa y mercenaria ... Que habiendo siempre el interés de los unos la oposición con el de los otros en vez de haber servido aquel como núcleo para la unión de todos los artistas estos no han formado nunca un cuerpo, sino un crecido número de individualidades (the arts never having had their own life, the fortune of artists has always been disadvantageous, indecorous, and mercenary ... that the interest of some always having been their opposition to the interest of others instead of the latter serving as a nucleus for the unity of all artists they have never formed a body, but rather are a large number of individuals).

Basili now explains that an obstacle to the progress of the fine arts in the past and which degraded them, was their reliance for sustenance on the protection of patrons, including at times the government and business speculators. This fostered the dependence of artists on parties with little first-hand knowledge of the arts; they ended up following the dictates of their protectors like “trained monkeys.” Artists could not rely on society in general for support because under existing conditions their productions appeared to have neither utility nor importance. He writes:

Esta utilidad e importancia solo les toca manifestarla a los de la misma clase, realizándolas con el buen porte de cada uno y con la hermandad de todos los que las hacen recomendables. Faltando esto la clase cae en el desprecio de todos y en el abatimiento. Los ejemplos parciales ensalzan al individuo y rebajan a las clases tanto más, cuanto ponen en más evidencia los defectos

generales (It is only appropriate for them [artists] to demonstrate this utility and importance to those people of the same class [artists], enhancing this with the good conscience of each individual and with the brotherhood of all of those people who make them worthy of promotion. Lacking this, the whole class falls subject to everyone's disdain and disparagement. Demonstrations of self-interest extol the individual to the detriment of the class, to such an extent that they make evident general imperfections).

Basili's solution to this problem is to distinguish government patronage from the state's potential for protecting cultural life, and to appeal to class solidarity. He thus calls upon the Queen to help artists become free agents who can unite to help one another. Specifically, so artists can seek their own wellbeing, and that of the arts in general, he urges the Queen to provide practitioners of the arts with "la libertad de acción imposible de existir mientras estén circunscritas a la clase de mercenarios (freedom of action that cannot exist while they are subject to the mercenary class [of speculators]." As in the previous letters, the musicians' freedom from the business class will involve the creation of a venue for national opera. Now, however, Basili also includes foreign opera and dance. In addition, he suggests the creation of two other theatres. The first should be a Royal Theatre for Declamation and the second a performance hall for "Dramas de espectáculo y ópera cómica Española, si fuese necesario (spectacle dramas and Spanish comic opera, if it were necessary)." For this last theatre, he probably envisioned a venue that would perform the most serious and highly anticipated contemporary works that required special effects and sets, like José Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio*. He also speaks of comic opera, "if it were necessary," surely in case the government decided not to establish a building specifically for lyric theatre.³⁷

The most fascinating part of his appeal is its language regarding social relationships and that Basili wished to found three new theatres as just the beginning of a more socially and artistically radical programme. His end goal and vision is the creation of a vast, unified national theatre enterprise. He speaks of founding

una sociedad artística, que comprenda todos los teatros de España y que organizando una vasta empresa convierta el ejercicio del arte en una carrera cuyos individuos estén interesados en su prosperidad tanto más fácil de conseguir, en cuanto podrán poner en práctica una infinidad de economías imposibles en la administración de un solo teatro, obligando así a que los artistas marchen todos a un fin común y proporcionándoles el medio para que estas artes, que han vivido siempre a costa de otros, lleguen por sus propios recursos y la organización de su trabajo a hacerse independientes ... sin necesidad de vender sus servicios a otros (a society for the arts which comprises all of the theatres of Spain, and which by organizing a vast theatre enterprise converts the exercise of art into a professional career whose individuals have an interest in its prosperity[. This will be] so much easier to achieve because they will be able to put into practice an infinity of economies impossible in the administration of a separate and individual theatre, thus

making it necessary for artists to march toward a common goal and by providing it [the society] with the means that will make it possible for these arts, which have always lived dependent on other people, by their own initiative and organization of their work to be independent ... without the need to sell their services to other people).

Basili understands the difficulty of implementing his plan, and to guide this corporation of the nation's theatres he also recommends the creation of an arts institute. He furthermore wants a board of directors to provide leadership for his vast theatre conglomerate:

En la creación del Instituto se formará un cuerpo de la primeras notabilidades Artísticas, Literarias, Comerciales y Aristocráticas, que con el objeto de proteger el arte vigilen para que este proyecto llegue a su debido efecto, examine las cuentas y sirba de Tribunal si la Dirección comitiese alguna injusticia (In the creation of the Institute a body will be formed of the most notable Artistic, Literary, Commercial, and Aristocratic personalities who with the object of protecting the arts will keep vigil so that this project achieves its proper end; [they will] examine the accounts and serve as a judiciary panel if Management were to commit an injustice).

In addition to this, Basili wants all artists to be obliged to belong to the new Society.³⁸ Clearly he expected the government to compel them to do so:

Es inútil recordar que una vez la Sociedad dueña de los teatros de todas las principales ciudades, todos los artistas se verían obligados a inscribirse en él. Estos artistas se verán obligados a dejar un tanto por ciento de todas las ganancias que los proporcione la sociedad, según lo establezca el reglamento. En proporción de las sumas que hayan dejado en el Establecimiento por el tiempo que se marque en el reglamento, percibirá una pensión o renta (It is not necessary to state that once the Society takes over the theatres of all the principal cities, all artists would be obliged to enroll in it [the Society that will be formed]. These artists will be obliged to contribute a certain percentage of all the earnings the Society provides them, as established by the [its] statute. In proportion to the amount they have contributed to the Society, as per its statute, they will receive a pension or income).

Basili's proposals anticipate the Royal theatre decrees of 1849, because he conceived of them as organic in nature, with all performance halls composing a united whole. The Real Decreto Orgánico, however, was different because of its limited categorization of theatres as being of the first, second, or third class, the generic limitations it imposed on performance halls, and its handling of other material conditions of cultural life, like the pay scale for dramatists. It sought to regulate rather than control theatres.³⁹ In comparison, Basili's proposals are far more social in nature. They emerge from the experience of alliance in associations, which starting in the 1830s gave rise to groups like the Liceo Artístico y Literario

and El Insituto Español. As Basili states at the beginning of his presentation to the Queen in November 1847, he has been moved to write, “guiado del espíritu de progreso y asociacionismo que tanto movimiento imprime al mundo actual (guided by the spirit of progress and association which has gathered such momentum in today's world).”

Basili here probably refers to the rise of labour associations and social movements beyond the borders of his home country. Within Spain, social alliances specifically on behalf of labour first showed signs of coming to life in Catalonia in the 1830s. In 1847, when Basili wrote, they were still in an embryonic stage. While artists who entered into the associations that did exist in Spain always concerned themselves with the difficult economic conditions they faced, we know of their groups as principally recreational and cultural in nature, not as labour organizations. There are nevertheless indications that in a limited way they also did address their members' material situation. Francisco Villacorta Baños' description of Madrid's Liceo Artístico y Literario in the 1830s is suggestive of this. He speaks for example of the Liceo's interest in providing a venue for marketing art from which the society also benefited. This would support artists as well as the organization's operations:

No pocas de las actividades del Liceo—cátedras, exposiciones, conciertos, representaciones, veladas—y de las publicaciones de su revista se nutrían de las obras elaboradas reglamentariamente en las distintas secciones, que, de esta forma actuaban como auténticos talleres intermediarios de creación artística. Además en las constituciones del Liceo se creaba un salón público para depositar las obras en venta, de cuya transacción el establecimiento recibía el 10 por 100. Así pues, vemos curiosamente integrados en la vida del Liceo tres elementos del hecho artístico que posteriormente han de diferenciarse con más nitidez; primero una nueva y potencial clientela que sustituye parcialmente a la Iglesia y a la Corte como ámbitos casi exclusivos de demanda de obras artísticas; segundo un centro artístico que coloca a los creadores en comunicación entre sí y con sus potenciales clientes; comunicación, por último realizada a través de la exposición de las obras de los socios (Not a few activities of the Liceo—courses, exhibitions, concerts, socials—and of the publications of its magazine were nurtured by the works elaborated statutorily in its different sections, which, in this way acted as authentic intermediary workshops for artistic creation. In addition, by the constitutions of the Liceo a public *salon* was created for placing works up for sale, and the establishment received 10% from these transactions. We see then, curiously, integrated in the life of the Liceo three elements of artistic reality which later would be clearly differentiated; first, a new and potential clientele which partially takes the place of the church and the Court as the exclusive sources for demand of artistic works; second, an artistic center which places creators in communication with one another and with potential clients; communication, finally, which is made possible by the exposition of the works of the association's members.)⁴⁰

By the time of Basili's petition to the Queen in 1847 we can note the founding of the *Velada de Artistas, Artesanos, Jornaleros y Labradores* (Society of Artists, Artisans, Labourers, and Agricultural Workers) which brought together such diverse groups as carpenters, printers, tailors, shoemakers, goldsmiths, bricklayers, bookbinders, locksmiths, hairdressers, bakers, glassblowers, veterinarians, as well as painters, actors, and sculptors. Besides being educational in nature, it also served as a mutual aid society: one of its statutes states that funds that remained after the society met its other expenses would be earmarked for "socorros, pensiones y viudedades (assistance, pensions and widowhood)."⁴¹

Basili's proposals of November 1847 present a still greater consciousness of work in the arts as labour and the need for its organization. In them he was on the brink of suggesting an incipient labour syndicate; a dues-supported union for people who worked in performance. His intention, however, was restricted to founding an organization for the defence of artists and, so far as we can see from his document, not to militate on their behalf. Notwithstanding this limitation in terms of unionization as we understand it today, he in effect placed musicians within the slowly emergent history of Spain's labour movement. A component of this plan for the betterment of artists was the establishment of a new national opera as a genre and of a theatre venue especially for it. He thus implicitly makes lyric theatre, as well, a part of Spain's early labour history.

The association of artists that Basili envisioned did not materialize; nor did the national opera, if we consider this a musical composition without spoken dialogue. Instead, by the mid-nineteenth century Spain achieved its mature comic opera or zarzuela, a surrogate for the desired lyric theatre, or for people like Francisco Asenjo Barbieri, the national opera, itself. This then evolved into the extraordinarily popular *género chico* of the second half of the century, with so many stories rooted in the daily life and passions of working class Spaniards, music that reflects Spanish popular tradition, and lyrics that have become familiar enough for people to hum them as they went about their everyday affairs. One should not doubt the professionalism and dedication to their art of the musicians who gave us these zarzuelas or reduce such an important cultural development as its rise to simple economic determinism. We should also keep in mind, however, that in its origins the material conditions of life weighed upon its progenitors. If the genre was created out of a love for music and theatre, it also owed its existence to a need to earn money and a conscious attempt to find an artistic vehicle for that purpose. In this sense, notwithstanding its content which customarily reflects and appeals to Spain's popular classes, as a cultural form the Isabelline zarzuela is a highly bourgeois genre which contributes to the development of a modern national entertainment industry. If we understand it in this way we also will appreciate the aesthetic problem that writers of zarzuelas faced reflected in the tension one sometimes feels during their performance between art and commercialism.

¹ *Historia del movimiento obrero español*, Prol. Robert Marrast (Barcelona: Editorial Nova Terra, 1970), 38. Throughout this article translations from Spanish are those of the author.

² Mónica Bolufer Peruga, "Del salón a la asamblea: Sociabilidad, espacio público y ámbito privado (siglos XVII-XVIII)." *Saitabi* 56 (2006): 121-48.

³ Joaquín Álvarez Barrientos, "Sociabilidad literaria: Tertulias y cafés en el siglo XVIII," *Espacios de la comunicación literaria* (Madrid: CSIC, 2002): 129-47.

⁴ See, for example Moratín's two-act comedy, *La comedia nueva* (1792) and Larra's article of manners or *costumbrista* article, "¿Quién es el público y dónde se le encuentra?" Particularly interesting for a discussion of the café in Moratín's play is the introductory study in *La comedia nueva o el café*, ed, intro. and notes by Joaquín Álvarez Barrientos; Orientaciones para el montaje by J. L. Alonso de Santos (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2000). There are numerous editions of Larra's articles, and "¿Quién es el público ..." frequently is anthologised.

⁵ The documents here referred to are unpublished monthly summaries of income from various forms of entertainment all around the Peninsula in the Consejos section of Madrid's Archivo Histórico Nacional.

⁶ For a detailed description of this bizarre event see Michael Schinasi, "Battles of Wild Animals and Commercial Mass Culture in Mid-Nineteenth Century Spain," *Romance Languages Annual* 1 (1990): 609-15. This was not the only such event though others like it were apparently rare. See Vol. I of José María de Cossío, *Los toros* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1943).

⁷ Luis Miguel Fernández, *Tecnología, espectáculo, literatura: dispositivos ópticos en las letras españolas de los siglos XVIII y XIX* (Santiago de Compostela: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 2006).

⁸ Michael Schinasi, "The Anarchy of Theatrical Genres in Mid-Nineteenth Century Spain," *Romance Languages Annual* 2 (1991): 534-39.

⁹ We see this in a speech by the hero, Luis, in Ventura de la Vega's *El hombre de mundo* (*The Worldly Man*, 1845). Theatre historiography often considers this play Spain's prototypical bourgeois comedy. He is speaking of the peace and simpler life he experiences on a daily basis as a reformed and recently married rake: "In the evening a stop/ by the café, and off to the theatre:/once the show is over/home" (1.3).

¹⁰ A good example of this is in the origins of Barcelona's Gran Teatre del Liceu. For a brief history of the performance hall see <http://www.societatliceu.com/es/historia>. Also chapter 6 of Jesus Cruz, *The Rise of Middle-Class Culture in Nineteenth-Century Spain* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011).

¹¹ We can take as examples Larra's early article "Yo quiero ser cómico (I Want to be an Actor)," or the little-known autobiographical novel by Enrique Pérez Escrich, *El frac azul. Episodios de un joven flaco* (1864; *The Blue Frock Coat; Episodes about a Skinny Young Man*). This tells the story of a young man who leaves his provincial home in Valencia to make a life for himself as a writer for the theatre in Madrid. The biographies of the young people of the generation of 1830 and 1854 in Spain, in general, confirm Pérez Escrich's typicality.

¹² Lisa Surwillo, *The Stages of Property: Copyrighting Theatre in Spain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

¹³ *Arquitectura teatral en España. December 1984 -January 1985. Exposición de la Dirección de Arquitectura y Vivienda. MOPU* (Madrid: Servicio de Publicaciones. Secretaría General Técnica. MOPU, 1985). For an excellent expansive view of theatre life in the first half of the nineteenth century see the first chapter of, David T. Gies, *El teatro en la España del siglo XIX*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹⁴ I take the term "Isabelline Zarzuela" from a presented paper by Víctor Sánchez y Sánchez, "Barbieri, compositor de óperas cómicas," *II Bienal de Música Isabelina. Definiciones y Fronteras en la Música Isabelina. Jornadas de Estudio*. Museo Nacional del Romanticismo, Madrid, April 1-2, 2016. He states, "El surgimiento y el auge de la zarzuela es uno de los fenómenos fundamentales de la música en el período isabelino, que por la fuerte relación con este período histórico debería denominarse «zarzuela isabelina.» [the emergence and the height reached by the zarzuela is one of the fundamental phenomena in the music of the Isabelline period, and because of its strong connection to this historical period ought to receive the denomination 'Isabelline zarzuela.']. Unlike Italian opera, the author of a zarzuela's text is often as equal in importance as its composer.

- ¹⁵ Espín Templado, María Pilar and Ana María Freire López, *Historia de la zarzuela* (I). <https://canal.uned.es/mmobj/index/id/12130>.
- ¹⁶ *La ópera española y la música dramática en España en el siglo XIX* (Madrid: Impr. y Estereotipia de El Liberal, 1881), 74.
- ¹⁷ Peña y Goñi, 80. David T. Gies has done an excellent job of describing the popularity foreign opera companies achieved in the first third of the nineteenth century and its effect on non-lyric theatre. See "Entre drama y ópera : La lucha por el público teatral en la época de Fernando VII," *Bulletin Hispanique* 91(1989): 37-60.
- ¹⁸ Peña y Goñi, 116-17.
- ¹⁹ Peña y Goñi, 267.
- ²⁰ Espín Templado, María Pilar and Ana María Freire López, *Historia de la zarzuela* (I).
- ²¹ *La zarzuela* (Madrid: Imprenta de José M. Ducazcal, 1864), 20.
- ²² *Proyecto-memoria presentado a S.M la Reina para la creación de una Academia de Música* (Madrid: Imprenta de José M. Ducazcal, 1864), 53.
- ²³ Peña y Goñi, 295.
- ²⁴ Peña y Goñi, 313.
- ²⁵ This is taken from a document among Francisco Asenjo Barbieri's extensive collection of personal papers that deal with cultural life in Spain: *Papeles de Barbieri*, MSS 1400213, Título 4º, Artículo 63, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid.
- ²⁶ For a lengthier discussion of the theatre reforms of 1849 see Michael Schinasi, *Ventura de la Vega and El hombre de mundo: At the Threshold of the Realist Period in Spain* (Vigo: Editorial Academia del Hispanismo, 2015).
- ²⁷ For excellent discussions of these societies and some of the labour concerns of musicians related to them see María Aurelia Díez Huerga, "Las sociedades musicales en el Madrid de Isabel II (1833-1868)" *Anuario Musical* 58(2003): 253-77, and María Encina Cortiza, "El asociacionismo en los orígenes de la zarzuela moderna," *Cuadernos de música iberoamericana* 8-9(2001): 41-72. For another outstanding work on the subject of music associations and the rise of the mature zarzuela in general see: Antonine Le Duc, *La zarzuela: Les origines du théâtre lyrique national en Espagne (1832-1851)* (Sprimont: Mardaga, 2003).
- ²⁸ Díez Huerga, 67.
- ²⁹ Encina Cortizo, 41.
- ³⁰ *La Iberia Musical*, Año 2, 1843: 4.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² Díez Huerga, 256.
- ³³ Archivo Histórico Nacional, Consejos, 11.416 núm. 85. The three letters here referenced are collected in this group of archival documents. All quotes are from the original documents. It is not clear from them what relationship they had to the association La España Musical, founded in 1847 by Basilio Basili, one of their authors. By the coincidence of their dates, the individuals involved, and the interests expressed one can assume that a relationship existed.
- ³⁴ For information on the history of these decrees see the biographic section of Michael Schinasi, *Ventura de la Vega and El hombre de mundo: At the Threshold of the Realist Period in Spain* (Vigo: Editorial Academia del Hispanismo, 2015); further detail is added by Encina Cortizo, 66-7.
- ³⁵ Encina Cortizo, 67. It appears that already in 1847 musicians had at least an intuition of the way theatre reform would be detrimental to them, though the limitations on theatre decreed in 1849 must have still only been rumor. The Benavides decrees which were the subject of discussion in 1847, to which Le Duc refers (97), are not the same as the Real Decreto Orgánico (The Royal Organic Decree) of 1849. The Queen authorized the Benavides measures but never put them into effect. They were superseded by the regulations of 1849. It would be interesting to have a complete comparison of the two documents.
- ³⁶ The definition of the word, "clase (class)" in the history of the Spanish Royal Academy Dictionary is interesting in this regard. It remains constant from at least the mid eighteenth century. In 1852 it continues to be, "orden o número de personas del mismo grado, calidad u oficio; como: la clase de los grandes, de los nobles, etc. (order or number of people of the same rank, quality or occupation; as: the class of grandees, of nobles, etc.)." In the 1869 dictionary the definition begins to change. Instead of giving the examples of the grandees along with the nobility it speaks only of the nobility and adds

“menestrales,” which in general is someone who does more mechanical labor and earns her or his sustenance with his or her hands. This is similar to the current definition, except that now the only example it gives is “la clase de los trabajadores (the working class).” Thus we can speak of three stages in the word’s recent evolution: with the example of *grandees* and nobles, manual laborers or artisans (*menestrales*) and nobility, and workers. My source here is the Spanish Royal Academy’s dictionary of dictionaries, the *Nuevo tesoro lexicográfico de la lengua española* (<http://www.rae.es/recursos/diccionarios/diccionarios-antiguos-1726-1992/nuevo-tesoro-lexicografico>).

³⁷ Le Duc refers briefly to the disappointment of musicians in the Benavides theatre reform measures of 1847 in the way it takes into account lyric theatre alongside dance and the *comedia de figurón* (theatre that centres on a figure who in some way is “larger than life,” much like the spectacle drama that Basili speaks of). He does not reference Basili or directly mention the documents in the present article; they are not listed in his notes or his bibliography. He states that musicians had heard about what the forthcoming decrees might include with regard to the same forms of theatre Basili speaks of. He also notes that the government regulations were published in the periodical press in September, the same month as the first of the three documents here covered.

³⁸ Compare Basili’s proposal on obliging musicians to participate with the Constitution of the Liceo Artístico y Literario (1837), which makes participation a matter of choice, like belonging to a professional association: “todos los profesores nacionales o extranjeros tienen derecho a pertenecer al Liceo (all national or foreign musicians have the right to belong to the Liceo);” quoted in Encina Cortizo, 43.

³⁹ Work on Spanish theatre regulations of the nineteenth century remains to be carried out. For a limited review of the 1849 theatre reforms see, Michael Schinasi, *Ventura de la Vega and El hombre de mundo: At the Threshold of the Realist Period in Spain*.

⁴⁰ Francisco Villacorta Baños, *Burguesía y cultura. Los intelectuales españoles en la sociedad liberal, 1808-1931* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1980): 35-6.

⁴¹ Jean-Louis Guereña, “Les antécédents du «Fomento de las Artes». La «Velada de artistas, artesanos, jornaleros y labradores» (1847-1858), *Bulletin Hispanique* 92(1990): 776.