

# LISTENING TO MUSIC: PEOPLE, PRACTICES AND EXPERIENCES

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## Prefiguring the Spanish recording diva: how *gabinetes fonográficos* (phonography studios) changed listening practices, 1898–1905

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### Abstract

This chapter situates early commercial recordings made in Spain by local *gabinetes fonográficos* between 1898 and 1905 in the aural landscape of their time. In order to do so, it examines a range of audio-visual media, including original wax cylinders, advertisements, trade publications, press articles and other accounts of listening experiences from the arrival of phonographs in Spain in the late 1870s to the demise of the *gabinetes* around 1905, when they were absorbed or rendered obsolete by multinational recording companies. Such early recordings must be interpreted alongside the thriving theatrical culture that prevailed in Spain at the time, especially that of *zarzuela* – the preferred genre of theatre-goers and the best represented, according to available evidence, in catalogues of *gabinetes fonográficos*. A range of primary sources suggest that recordings were intended as a memento to go hand-in-

hand with the experience of listening to music live; as such, the *gabinetes fonográficos* industry was uniquely built in close connection to the theatrical culture.

## Introduction

This chapter examines the place occupied by early commercial recordings made in Spain by local *gabinetes fonográficos* (**phonography studios**) between 1898 and 1905 in the aural landscape of their era, including how listening to recorded music related to other listening experiences that Spanish listeners regularly engaged in at the time. My focus on this body of recordings has been partially fuelled by my admiration for Catalan soprano María Barrientos (1883–1946) and her Paris recordings of Manuel de Falla's *Siete canciones populares españolas* (1928), *Soneto a Córdoba* and 'Canción del fuego fatuo' from *El amor brujo* (1930). With Falla himself accompanying Barrientos on the piano and closely supervising the recording sessions, the output of these can certainly be labelled as one of the very first examples of creator's recordings in Spanish art music,<sup>1</sup> and Barrientos was an obvious choice for Falla's endeavours: she had championed Spanish music since the mid-1910s, being the dedicatee and first performer of Enrique Granados's song *Elegia eterna* (which, however, she never recorded) and frequently giving recitals of Spanish music, both old (Blas de Laserna) and new (Joaquín Nin, Joaquín Turina, Amadeo Vives, Francesc Alió, Falla himself). She had also enjoyed from a very young age an international career as a *bel canto* specialist, and as a result of this she was one of few Spanish singers to feature in the catalogues of multinational record companies in the late 1900s and 1910s. Barrientos was starting her career at the time of the *gabinetes fonográficos*, but there is no evidence that she ever recorded for any of them: in fact, her first set of recordings was made for the Italian label Fonotipia in 1906 and it included both the *bel canto* repertoire in which she specialised and *zarzuela* arias.

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42.000 La tonta de capriote	(Valverde y Estrella)

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Figure 1: Advertisement by Fonotipia and Odeón, including María Barrientos as one of their featured artists, published in La Vanguardia, 20 September 1928

At a time in which Spanish nationalist composers fought for recognition abroad and also within Spain, Barrientos's career as a recording artist significantly capitalised on her dual status as an internationally successful singer and champion of the developing Spanish repertoire. Barrientos's standing as one of the first - if not the first - Spanish divas of recorded music,<sup>2</sup> though, cannot be understood without reference to her predecessors, that is, the singers who recorded for the *gabinetes fonográficos* around the turn of the century, and especially those singing Spanish vocal repertoire - which at the time was not predominantly Spanish art song or opera, but rather *zarzuela*, as I will explain later. Fifty years separate the arrival of the first phonographs in Spain in the late 1870s and the Barrientos-Falla recordings. It is outside the scope of this chapter to provide a full account of this period; my aim is instead to illustrate and interrogate a crucial moment in the history of early recordings in Spain in which they began to be commercially produced for the first time, and to elucidate how new listening practices developed in close interrelationship with their context. In fact, evidence reveals that the *gabinetes'* recordings were intimately connected to the place and context in which

they were made, bought and/or listened to. This connection between recorded artefacts and attachment to place can be found in Barrientos's recordings too.

## How to listen to recordings

Early accounts of the phonograph written by Edison himself with a view to market it were based to a considerable extent on the concept of fidelity: phonograph recordings as perfect reproductions of reality.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, central to the issue at hand is the notion that one does not simply *know* instinctively how to listen to recordings as if they were merely an identical substitute of reality; instead, one needs to learn how to do so (in the same way as, several decades before the phonograph was invented, photographers needed to learn how to codify meaning in their photographs and spectators needed to learn how to decode it.)<sup>4</sup> Much of the bibliography on recorded music and recording technologies published in the last 20 years has focused precisely on this issue. It could be argued that, with the increasing attention paid to recordings as sources of performance history,<sup>5</sup> there soon came a sense that, as with any other source, recordings should not be taken at face value, but the ways in which historical audiences listened to them, thought about them, negotiated them should also be examined critically. Here I briefly cover some concepts relating to how early audiences of recorded music learned how to make sense of recordings.

Ashby defines phonographic literacy (a 'culturally instilled skill') as 'the ability to enjoy music away from the place and perpetrators of its performance'.<sup>6</sup> This may involve, particularly at the early stages of the history of recorded music, audiences, musicians and producers working out the relationship between live and recorded sound: is the latter supposed to replace the former, or are they supposed to work together? Patrick Feaster's concept of 'performative fidelity' is especially useful here:

*the extent to which the socially situated playback of an indexically recorded action is accepted as doing whatever the original would have done in the same context.*<sup>7</sup>

Edison's marketing materials indeed relied to a great extent on the notion that audio fidelity would inevitably lead to performative fidelity: if a recording was sufficiently similar aurally to the original, it would also automatically absorb its contextual functions. In particular – and this is especially relevant in the context of turn-of-the-century Spain with its thriving theatrical culture, as I will explain later on – recorded music changes what Lisa Gitelman calls the 'visuality' of music ('the sum of visual

experiences that bolster and accompany musical practice and that extend to the societal norms of visually apprehending practice’),<sup>9</sup> thus leaving it to audiences to negotiate new understandings of performative fidelity in the absence of visual elements. With the emergence of recorded music, live music becomes thinkable for the first time too (before recording, ‘live music’ would be a redundancy).<sup>9</sup>

Much discussed in the study of how recorded music changed listening practices is the commodification of music, which has often been portrayed as negative for audiences and musicians, who have no choice but to accept commodification passively.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, commodification is not always a top-down or uniform process, but is, instead, context-specific, its evolution and form dependent on a variety of factors, including the means of reproduction themselves and the various agents involved.<sup>11</sup>

These and other critical concepts have never been applied to the history of early recording technologies in Spain (Mariano Gómez-Montejano provides in his book an informative, if non-theorised, account of the *gabinetes fonográficos*).<sup>12</sup> Rather tellingly, such critical concepts have emerged mostly from accounts of early recording technologies in technologically advanced countries, or within musical cultures considered prominent (for example, Germany for art music, the United States or the United Kingdom for popular music). Focusing on a country like Spain, which was neither, can help emphasise the importance of context (both in space and time) in the development, reception and fashioning of recording technologies: listening practices connected to recorded music, we could argue, are not only time-specific, but can be place-specific as well.

Before I launch into detailed discussion, I would like to offer an overview of the broader context. 1898 has repeatedly been singled out as a crucial year in modern Spanish history, as this was the year in which Spain lost its last overseas colonies (the Philippines, Puerto Rico and, perhaps more famously, Cuba). The loss accelerated debates which had been taking shape in the preceding two decades concerned with the regeneration of Spain (*regeneracionismo*) on an existential, economic, political, cultural and, perhaps more importantly for the purposes of this chapter, scientific level; in fact, turn-of-the-century Spain saw a renewed interest, which partly echoed a trend stemming from earlier in the nineteenth century, in scientific and technological advances as a way of improving the country’s education system, its industry and agriculture. Based on these principles, the Ministry for Public Instruction was founded in 1900, followed by a restructuring of university teaching and infrastructure to make it more empirical.<sup>13</sup> Recorded sound, thus, has to be understood not only as a cultural product, but also as a technological achievement.

## Gabinetes fonográficos: an overview

Spaniards first had the opportunity of seeing and listening to Edison's phonograph shortly after its invention in 1877; in the next decade or so, phonographs were occasionally exhibited and played as a scientific curiosity in front of audiences belonging mostly to the middle and upper classes.<sup>14</sup> Edison's Perfected Phonograph, introduced in 1888, revitalised interest in recording technologies: phonographs started to be toured around the country by funfair impresarios and scientific popularisers, and exhibited at inns, civic centres, church halls and private homes at a cost affordable to the working classes. Some educational institutions, notably secondary schools, also acquired phonographs for teaching purposes.<sup>15</sup> Individuals who bought phonographs for their own private use were still a minority, while recordings were produced on an ad hoc basis by the operators or owners of the phonographs themselves, and not intended for being sold independently.

It was not until the launch of Edison's Standard Phonograph in 1898 that we can speak of a record industry starting to develop in Spain: phonographs imported from abroad were sold either by pre-existing retail businesses, mostly in the healthcare and technology areas, or by newly created establishments. Since customers needed access to a reasonably broad range of recorded repertoire in order to make the acquisition of a phonograph worth the money, such establishments started to produce and sell recordings on wax cylinder support; thus came about the *gabinetes fonográficos*. Preserved cylinders and written records suggest that about 40 *gabinetes* were in operation between 1898 and 1905 in Spain, mostly in the cities of Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia.



**FONÓGRAFOS**  
VIUDA DE ARAMBURO  
12, PRÍNCIPE, 12. MADRID  
**FONÓGRAFOS Y GRAFÓFONOS EDISON**  
**MODELOS DE 1897**  
Diafragmas Bettini, Cilindros en blanco, Cilindros impresos españoles y americanos, y toda clase de accesorios para fonógrafos.  
**ENVÍOS A PROVINCIAS**  
**PÍDASE CATÁLOGO**

Figure 2: Advertisement by Viuda de Aramburo, published in Blanco y negro on 22 May 1897 (The fact that it was published in 1897 suggests that some *gabinetes* may have started their business before the Edison Perfected Phonograph.)

Although I consider the *gabinetes fonográficos* to mark the beginning of a recording industry in Spain, it must be noted that this industry still had a significant artisanal side to it. Indeed, the state of technology at the time still did not allow wax cylinders to be reproduced on an industrial scale while preserving an acceptable level of audio quality. Most wax cylinders sold at the time were thus one-offs, but this was not necessarily regarded as a negative thing; indeed, a number of *gabinetes* – including Sociedad Fonográfica Hugens y Acosta and Álvaro Ureña, both based in Madrid – took pride in the fact that they did not sell copies of their own or others' cylinders, while at the same time implying that other *gabinetes* did.

The fortnightly magazine *El cardo*, one of the first to dedicate its attention to the nascent industry under the form of a standing section called '*Boletín Fonográfico*' (Phonographic newsletter), supported Hugens y Acosta and Ureña in their endeavours, and suggested that copies of original cylinders should be labelled as such and sold at a cheaper price to protect the interests of both musicians and consumers.<sup>16</sup> Articles published in *El cardo*, though, suggest that no more than about a dozen copies could be made of the same cylinder without quality being compromised; this, again, is hardly on an industrial scale.

The development of the gramophone and the technological innovations enabling the reproduction of recordings on an industrial scale encouraged recording multinational companies to open subsidiaries in new markets all over the world,<sup>17</sup> including Spain from 1903, with Compagnie Française du Gramophon (Compañía Francesa del Gramófono) being the first.<sup>18</sup> By 1905, most *gabinetes* were no longer operative as such, with Sociedad Fonográfica Española Hugens y Acosta, one of the most successful, liquidating its assets on 9 December 1905.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, other *gabinetes*, such as *La Fonográfica Madrileña*, managed to survive as resellers of equipment and recordings manufactured by the multinationals; however, they stopped producing any recordings themselves, at a time in which multinational companies in other industries were also settling in Spain following similar strategies of partnership working with local companies.<sup>20</sup>

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Figure 3: Advertisement by La Fonográfica Madrileña, published in ABC on 6 January 1909

## Learning to listen to recordings in turn-of-the-century Spain

In this section, I discuss what available evidence indicates about the ways in which early listeners of recorded music in Spain started to build phonographic literacy by listening to, decoding and making sense of the *gabinetes*' recordings in their specific cultural and social context. Two caveats precede my discussion: firstly, even though the *gabinetes* made it easier for customers in the upper and middle classes to acquire phonographs, we must not infer from this that they operated a generalised change in the ways in which the Spanish population listened to music. In fact, the evidence suggests that those being regularly exposed to recorded music were still in a minority. After two years operating as a society, the Sociedad Fonográfica Española Hugen y Acosta declared that it had 2,000 customers.<sup>21</sup> This certainly does not mean that only 2,000 people had listened to Hugen y Acosta's recordings; although it is not clear what the word 'customer' means, it seems reasonable to think that it referred to repeat customers who regularly bought in person or by correspondence from Hugen y Acosta; the *gabinete* probably had a number of 'one-off' customers as well.

Similarly, it is very likely that, through those 2,000 customers, other people became exposed to recorded music (for example, their families and friends). Even considering that other *gabinetes* may have had their own pools of customers (likely smaller, since Hugen y Acosta was one of the most prolific *gabinetes*, as well as being one of the

most active in their publicity efforts), the numbers remains small considering that the population of Spain exceeded eighteen million in 1900.

The second caveat refers to the types and the scope of the evidence available about the experience of listening to recordings. In testimonies written by or about early listeners of recorded music and, more generally, discourses about recorded music, it is striking how little detail there is about the music itself. This is the case with the two main industry publications of the time of the *gabinetes*: *El cardo*, which I have already mentioned, and *Boletín Fonográfico* in Valencia (which published 40 issues from January 1900 to October 1901). *Boletín Fonográfico* focused primarily on technological developments and provided detailed accounts of devices and techniques developed by their readers themselves to improve the recording capabilities of the phonograph.<sup>22</sup> Profiles of individual singers, on the other hand, were rather generic and included little detail on their technical or interpretative capabilities; when they did mention aspects such as range, articulation or timbre of the voice, it was almost invariably to explain why some voices are more suitable to be recorded than others.<sup>23</sup>

*El cardo's Boletín Fonográfico*, on the other hand, focused mostly on the industrial and commercial aspects of recorded music, with extensive advocacy against the duplication of cylinders and for the signing of exclusive rights contracts between specific singers and *gabinetes*.<sup>24</sup> In itself, though, this focus on the technological and industrial aspect of recordings is a valuable piece of evidence – a reminder that these should not be regarded solely as artistic artefacts, and were not regarded as such in their own time. Data about the repertoire recorded, the singers taking part in the recordings, and the strategies followed by the *gabinetes* to market their products can also offer valuable information about how recordings were received and decoded by their audiences.

In order to understand how recordings were understood in the era of the *gabinetes*, I would first like to refer back to the era of the Perfected Phonograph between 1888 and 1898. The new artefact was first marketed by Edison and his agents, in Spain and elsewhere, as a business aid intended mostly for dictation and correspondence;<sup>25</sup> entertainment did not feature highly among the uses Edison envisaged for his invention and, if anything, it was rather branded as a mixture of entertainment and preservation. Edison himself, naming Rubinstein, stated that one of the aims of the phonograph was to preserve the voices or playing of those known for their rhetoric, acting or musical skills.<sup>26</sup> Such arguments were soon put forward by Spanish writers too, sometimes enhanced with references to Spanish or local personalities whose voices were deemed worth preserving, such as tenor Julián Gayarre.<sup>27</sup>

Technologies, nevertheless, do not always end up filling the roles their creators envisaged for them. Indeed, what emerges from accounts of travelling phonographs around Spain is not a fascination with well-known singers, actors and orators, but, rather, with the recorded voice per se, in the first place, and, secondly, with the voices of people who were personally known to the audience. It was not often that announcements and accounts of phonographic sessions published in the press mention the names of specific singers featuring in such events, or of specific pieces to be played back; at most, they would give a general overview of the selection of genres available for listening (which were almost invariably opera, *zarzuela*, traditional music and military music, together with non-musical recordings including jokes, speeches and short stories).<sup>[28]</sup> This suggests that it was recorded music per se, and not the voices of specific internationally well-known singers, which was the main appeal and focus of the listening experience in many phonographic sessions.

When the focus was on one voice specifically, this would be the voice of someone known to the audience personally, that is, as a prominent musician or speaker at the local level. For example, in a visit to Madrid of Edison agents Mr Sean and Mr Warring to present the Perfected Phonograph in Spain, the Count of Aguilar de Inestrillas spoke out a voice of command in front of the phonograph which was promptly played back; as the commandant of the royal guard, Aguilar de Inestrillas was well-known locally, and certainly to the middle- and upper-class audience which had been invited to the event.<sup>[29]</sup> The same format can be found in a variety of events all over Spain, not necessarily organised by Edison's agents. In 1894, at the Coliseo of Logroño, local lawyer Pedro Montero gave a short speech and cornet player Lorenzo Colís played a solo, which were both subsequently played back by the phonograph – to audiences who would have known Montero and Colís at least by name. The programme also included a mandolin solo recorded in New York City, but one whose performer the audience would have probably been familiar with: José Olaguenaga, who was also from the region of La Rioja.<sup>[30]</sup> José Navarro Ladrón de Guevara (who would later on open his own *gabinete* in Madrid) visited Cartagena in 1896 with a phonograph, and made the recording and playback of local amateur singers into one of the pillars of his shows.<sup>[31]</sup>

These instances must be understood in a context in which audio fidelity was still one of the main attractions of the newly introduced recording technologies: in such phonographic sessions, what mattered to the organisers and presumably the audience was to check that the phonograph, as promised by Edison's propaganda, could be an acceptable means to reproduce sonic reality as *it was*. This is hardly exclusive of Spain, but can, rather, be interpreted as a logical reaction to the perspective of hearing recorded sound for the first time; in Spain, though, this concern with the phonograph as a means to reproduce reality ties in with a key question of *Regeneracionismo*: how to

best apprehend and reproduce reality, as a means of changing it; this is the implicit aim, for example, in Pío Baroja's realist literature.<sup>32</sup> The phonograph too was regarded by some as an artefact which might be able to change reality for the best by capturing and leaving a record of it for reference and reflection: some jurists argued that it could revolutionise the law, since it could allegedly record any person's words as they were spoken, hence smoothing out any ambiguities in the recording of wills and other documents.<sup>33</sup> The phonographic literacy of listeners of the Edison Standard Phonograph, though, still relied heavily on the connection between live and recorded music, and performative fidelity was regarded as the same as auditory fidelity; the fact that attempts at turning the phonograph into a notary of sorts never came to fruition, though, suggests that there was indeed a gap between both concepts.

The advent of the Standard Phonograph changed to some extent the way in which recordings were listened to and understood. There was, first of all, a key change in the technology: apart from being more affordable to at least the middle classes, the new phonograph allowed users to not only play back wax cylinders, but also to record their own. In fact, many of those buying phonographs from the *gabinetes* seem to have used them to this end: Valencia's *Boletín Fonográfico* organised a contest in which readers were encouraged to send in recordings they had made themselves, suggesting it was a popular entertainment.<sup>34</sup> But the true business of the *gabinetes fonográficos* was not based on their customers' familiarity with their immediate circle of friends, families and acquaintances anymore; it had moved a step beyond to voices which had a certain local or national profile, but with whom audiences would still have felt some close identification.

The repertoire recorded by the *gabinetes fonográficos* indeed speaks of the interrelation between live events and recordings of them. Advertisements of the *gabinetes* became more specific than those for phonographic sessions: a list of singers recording for the *gabinete* in question would normally be included, but not always the specific pieces or repertoire. The *gabinetes* may have chosen to do so for practical commercial reasons: with the recordings being one-offs and with each singer normally recording a range of pieces in their repertoire, it was probably a safer strategy to lure customers with singers' names than with recordings of specific pieces which may have been sold out by the time a customer enquired about them. But it is also likely that the owners of the *gabinetes* were aware that the voices of specific singers played a crucial role in most of their customers' experiences in listening to live music and they wanted to make the most of it: in fact, I suggest that the recordings made by the *gabinetes fonográficos*, albeit situated in a different level of phonographic literacy than the phonographic sessions with the Perfected Phonograph in that they did not rely anymore on the close association between the live experience and the recording, were

nonetheless intended to work as a memento of the theatre-going experience of their customers rather than as a stand-alone product. This must not be understood as a failure of audiences to acquire a sufficiently refined standard of phonographic literacy, but rather as a testimony that, throughout history, recorded music has different types of relationships or dependency to the actual live experience.

Theatre-going was indeed big at the time in Spain, and especially in Madrid, which was host to more *gabinetes* than any other Spanish city. Opera had a strong followership at the Teatro Real, but it was predominantly *zarzuela* which monopolised much of the theatre-going activity of *madrileños* across all social classes. From the evidence in the catalogues of the *gabinetes*, it is likely that *zarzuela* prevailed here too: there is certainly some preponderance of *zarzuela* over opera performers, although from the catalogues alone it is not possible to ascertain how many recordings each singer made. A survey of surviving recordings at the Biblioteca Nacional de España (BNE), digitised at Biblioteca Digital Hispánica, may illuminate further the distribution of recordings across genres (with the caveat that, with most recordings being a one-off, those preserved at the BNE are but a very small fraction of the total produced): out of 243 cylinders produced by Spanish *gabinetes* and containing some form of music, 98 are of *zarzuela*, 48 of traditional music, 47 of opera, 32 of instrumental music and 18 of other genres of light vocal music. *El cardo* also complained on a few occasions that *zarzuela* was more popular among the *gabinetes* and their customers than other genres their authors regarded as more refined.<sup>35</sup>

In order to examine what the listening experience for *zarzuela* audiences may have been like at the time the *gabinetes* were in full swing and the place that recordings may have played in it, I will first offer some context about the history of the genre. The beginnings of *zarzuela* in its modern form are conventionally dated back to the premiere of Francisco Asenjo Barbieri's *Jugar con fuego* in 1851. The following two decades were the reign of the so-called *zarzuela grande*: full-length pieces in three acts (that is, three to four hours), made up of numbers rather than through-composed; most *zarzuelas* were set in present-day Spain or in its recent past and, as such, offered a discourse of national identity which is perhaps best highlighted by the integration of a number of folk dance and musical forms, especially for choral and ensemble numbers. Young authors José Vallés, Juan José Luján and Antonio Riquelme pioneered in 1868 the so-called 'teatro por horas' (hourly, or hourly-paid theatre),<sup>36</sup> which was based on shorter pieces with a more condensed and streamlined plot.

During the 1880s, all *zarzuela* theatres in Madrid ended up adopting this format due to the costs and risks of putting together a full-length *zarzuela grande*: indeed, with the new *teatro por horas* format, theatres offered three or four one-hour plays – the so-

called *género chico*. Tickets were sold for each play individually at cheaper prices, which attracted audiences from a broader range of social classes, and an unsuccessful play was easier to replace than a full *zarzuela grande* without incurring great losses.<sup>37</sup> Most plots were still set in contemporary Madrid and cast an ironic if ultimately amiable eye on political and social issues while negotiating an integrative, yet still ideologically conservative, view of an industrialised, urban, modern Spain.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, with plays being shorter and the production process more streamlined, some changes needed to be introduced: folk-inspired numbers were not the province of choirs and ensembles anymore, and were instead introduced in the soloist's arias as well. This made them indeed easier to remember both for the audiences and for the singers themselves, many of whom were selected predominantly on the basis of their acting capabilities: indeed, a beautiful or trained voice in a *zarzuela* performer was seen as a welcome bonus, but not necessarily as a must. Dance numbers became more prominent as well.

At the time of the *gabinetes* around 1900, *género chico* was undergoing a transformation itself, its potential to critique or even represent social context becoming exhausted.<sup>39</sup> A new genre started to develop: *género ínfimo*, with plays becoming even shorter and more condensed, and comicality and dancing taking precedence over plot and musical development. In the next few years, *zarzuela* disintegrated even further: the *género sicalíptico* took the erotic aspects of the *género ínfimo* to the extreme; the *cuplé*, on the other hand, was equally risqué and took the style of the musical numbers of *género ínfimo* and transformed them into stand-alone songs to be sung in a cabaret-style setting.<sup>40</sup> Both the *género sicalíptico* and the *cuplé* were primarily the province of male audiences, with the purely listening experience being punctuated by visual enjoyment and sexual excitement.<sup>41</sup> But even in the less risqué genres such as *género chico* and *ínfimo*, it is clear the listening experience of theatre-goers in turn-of-the-century Spain was made up of many other aspects apart from the purely musical.

Indeed, evidence indicates that the *gabinetes'* recordings fed off the live music experience of theatre-goers. The locations of both *gabinetes* and *zarzuela* theatres in Madrid around 1900 is in itself illustrative. At the time, nine *zarzuela* theatres were active in Madrid which programmed *género chico* exclusively or to a significant extent (Alhambra, Apolo, Comedia, Eslava, Lara, Martín, Novedades, Parish and Zarzuela), with up to four plays being programmed each day. A simple mapping exercise shows that some of the *gabinetes* were next door or across the road from *zarzuela* theatres (and sometimes from each other). This opens up questions about the patterns and the locality of the production and consumption of early recordings. Unfortunately, the available records about the *gabinetes* do not offer much information about why their owners chose to open them in specific places, but their locations on the map suggest

that some phonography impresarios may have considered proximity to a theatre as a desirable characteristic when studying potential locations to open their *gabinetes*. Similarly, for existing businesses such as Viuda de Aramburo (originally a store of electrical equipment) and Obdulio Villasante (pharmacy), the comings and goings of *zarzuela* audiences past their establishment may have encouraged them to open a side-line to their business publishing and selling wax cylinder recordings.

The repertoire recorded also suggests that recordings were intended to go hand in hand with the live listening experience, rather than replace it. Some of the surviving recordings were likely intended to capitalise on a specific singer's success on the stage: for example, soprano Ascensión Miralles recorded the duet from Federico Chueca's *La alegría de la huerta* for Viuda de Aramburo shortly after she premiered it at the Teatro Eslava – though not with her original partner in the premiere, tenor José Riquelme, but with a Mr Navarro instead. The choir of the Teatro de la Zarzuela also recorded for Viuda de Aramburo the choral number 'Los de Calatorao' from *Gigantes y cabezudos* in 1898; *Gigantes* was perhaps the biggest *zarzuela* success of the year, with its commentary on the loss of Spain's last colonies. With *zarzuela* companies changing theatre and often also city on a yearly basis,<sup>42</sup> *gabinetes* also tried to capitalise on a singer's success after they had left the city; this is the case with sopranos Avelina Corona and Dolores Millanes; both were in Valencia as part of their tours around 1900 and recorded for local *gabinetes* there (Corona for Pallás, Millanes for Puerto and Novella); in both cases, the fact that they had been in the city and were hence known to the audiences was duly publicised among customers.<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusion

A look at the evidence available about the recordings made by Spanish *gabinetes fonográficos* provides a refreshing counterpoint to accounts of technological inevitability by illuminating the roles of listeners, small and medium-sized business owners, and singers in the process of experimenting with, adopting and spreading recorded music. But perhaps its primary interest lies in the fact that it highlights the role of local and national contexts in order to fully account for the changes that recorded sound introduced in the listening experience; from the turn of the century, as has been discussed earlier, multinational companies indeed took an interest in recording and marketing indigenous repertoires (and *zarzuela* and other Spanish genres such as *flamenco* were no exception), but this must not be regarded as the first time in which the recording business went global. Indeed, countries such as Spain had already started to create their own recording business – which, at least in the case of

Spain, was then dismantled by the arrival of the multinationals – based not only on the recording of their own music, but also on a complex relationship with the unique context in which those genres developed and thrived. It is in this way, I would like to argue, that it makes sense to place the first stars of recorded *zarzuela* as the predecessors of Barrientos later on, not simply because Barrientos herself recorded some of their repertoire, but because her dual status as both a performer with an international career and a champion of Spanish music still echoed some of the relationship between recorded music and the stage culture to which it belonged in its live status.

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**# EARLY RECORDINGS, PERFECTED PHONOGRAPH, PHONOGRAPH IN SPAIN,  
PHONOGRAPHIC LITERACY, SPANISH MUSICAL NATIONALISM, STANDARD  
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