THE COPLA MUSICAL: EXPLORING INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGES BETWEEN ENGLISH AND SPANISH MUSICAL THEATRE

THE COPLA MUSICAL: UNA EXPLORACIÓN INTERCULTURAL ENTRE EL TEATRO MUSICAL INGLÉS Y ESPAÑOL.

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Resumen: Mi investigación consiste en la adaptación de la copla, género folklórico-teatral de principios del siglo XX, mediante la apropiación de elementos de la tradición del teatro musical americano, en concreto, de la comedia musical, el drama musical y el jukebox. Los objetivos de esta investigación son proponer un modelo de creación para el teatro musical contemporáneo y, al mismo tiempo, hacer una reflexión sobre la práctica intercultural implícita en el proyecto. En este artículo explico tres procesos interculturales a través de las teorías de Pavis y Lo and Gilbert; y hablo sobre la legibilidad de la copla frente a un público multicultural del siglo XXI en la cosmopolita Londres. Mi hipótesis propone que, mediante la apropiación de elementos del teatro musical anglosajón, un nuevo híbrido cultural (la copla inglesa) puede iluminar el desarrollo del musical contemporáneo e interrogar las definiciones actuales del interculturalismo y sus aportaciones a la práctica creativa.

Palabras clave: Copla, musical, interculturalismo, híbrido, intercambio cultural

Abstract: My Practice as Research consists in adapting the early twentieth-century Spanish folkloric song-form of Copla, by appropriating elements found in American musical theatre, namely musical revue, book musical and jukebox shows. The outcome of this PaR is to propose a creative model of development in contemporary musical theatre, while critically reflecting on the intercultural practice that is implicit in this project. In this article, I discuss three intercultural processes in my practice through the critical lens of theorists Pavis and Lo and Gilbert; and I comment on the "readability" of Copla by a multicultural audience in twenty-first century London. My hypothesise is that by appropriating elements found in Anglophone musical theatre, a new hybrid intercultural songform (English Copla) should shed light on the development of contemporary musical theatre. Moreover, I offer a means to interrogate current definitions of interculturalism and its operation through creative practice.

Key words: Copla, musical, interculturalism, hybrid, cultural exchange

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This article reflects on the nature of hybrid forms of musical theatre based on the contributions of intercultural discourse to shed light on problems of cultural identification in musical theatre. I will discuss, through the case study of my practice-as-research project *The Copla Musical*, new dynamics of collaboration and creativity, and possible ways forward for intercultural musical theatre as a distinct form within the dominant West End-Broadway genus. My passion for Copla leads me into combining this Spanish folkloric song-form with principles inherent to the musical theatre artworks found in Britain and America that I group under the term "Anglophone" musical theatre. This practice follows an intercultural process focused on collaborating with a group of international artists representing both cultures and, through a collective act of will and effort, expressing a vision on the stage for a multicultural audience to experience. More importantly, and for the purposes of this article, I articulate interculturalism as a methodology that engages with "the fullness of cultural exchange in all its contradictions and convergences" (Lo and Gilbert, 2002, pg. 39). The creation of a hybrid form of musical theatre through collaborative processes seems to mirror the way that the popular genre generally developed, through appropriations of new forms and functions from other local and foreign cultures.

The Copla Musical is a full-length musical that re-imagines and expands Copla in the twenty-first century outside of Spanish boundaries for mainstream cosmopolitan audiences, such as those found in London; that is, a demography that mainly speaks and understands English. The practice involved writing a libretto integrating adaptations of original Copla songs, and collaborating with an international team of artists (lyricist, composer, actors, musicians, directors and theatre professionals of various sorts). These collaborations furthered the exploration of intercultural theory by facilitating culturally diverse and contemporary interpretations of the material. In this creative process, my collaborators and myself aimed to develop a cross-cultural dialogue and to observe how unique cultural identities represented by individual artists folded into that exchange. Each artist experienced a different interaction with Copla, conditioned by their previous knowledge of it, their personal connection with it, and the time they have been part of this project. Each collaborator filtered the text through their own experience of their country and their time, so that *The Copla Musical* is created in contemporary terms, clearly Spanish in source but intercultural in execution.

The main research perspective of this project involves reconstructing an indigenous art form (Spanish Copla) by interfacing it with a paradigmatic structure, which I define as mainstream British and American musical theatre. My intercultural approach explicitly engages in a transfer or exchange of cultures prompted by Weber's account of interculturalism which is "a collaboration and appropriation that brings forth art works that combine elements from separate cultures and their indigenous artistic traditions". (Weber, 1991, pg. 27).

1. Premises: Historical Contexts

The cultural developments of the Second Republic in Spain (1931-36) were disrupted with the start of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) and the subsequent Fascist dictatorship that began with the end of the war in 1939. The regime's strong censorship and political influencing in the arts affected in particular the content of musical theatre revues that proliferated during the Second Republic in Spain. Despite their popularity these variety shows did not integrate into book musicals in the way American revues started a route towards integration into musical comedies from the early 1920 at the Princess Theatre in New York (Stempel, 2010). Spanish revues enjoyed a prolific existence throughout the first few decades of the dictatorship and started a decline from the late 1960s, aggravated in the 1970s and 1980s due to "the disappearance of recognized composers, librettists, showgirls or comedians which led the genre to an nearby extinction" (Montijano, 2010, pg. 242) that revealed a vacuum in the entertainment industry quickly filled by blockbuster imports that attracted a bigger number of audiences. By the end of Franco's dictatorship in 1975, American and British musical theatre imports filled the Spanish stages through a growing globalization process that continues since the early 1970s (Patterson, 2010).

The Copla Musical explores how Copla songs that once took part in revues and folkloric theatre shows during the 1930s-1940s could possibly adapt and integrate into contemporary musical theatre beyond Spanish borders and still preserve their cultural identity in a foreign language and cultural setting. Anglophone musical theatre has historically been a successful dominant model that has adopted throughout its historical development a variety of indigenous art forms, thus its structure might

provide a series of paradigms to facilitate the integration of Spanish folkloric and musical theatre materials, and a subsequent internationalization and appreciation of those.

1.1. What is Copla? The development of Spanish musical theatre throughout the twentieth century

Musical theatre has historically developed alongside cultural values, that is, interculturally. Many European countries developed their forms of opera and operetta from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, anticipating the origins of musical theatre. In Spain the both operatic and theatrical genre of Zarzuela evolved into a lighter genre known as "género chico" (small Zarzuelas), which subsequently developed into lighter entertainment pieces, the revues, comprised of sketches and musical numbers with songs known as Cuplé and Copla. Popular revues from before the civil war such as *Las Leandras* (1931) evolved into more contained but still light-hearted pieces at the end of the war. *La Cenicienta del Palace* (1940) is considered by many to mark the birth of Spanish musical comedy, a genre that increased popularity throughout the early years of the dictatorship, becoming a form of escapism and evasion from post-war Spain's sad reality (Montijano, 2010, pg. 160). Despite the times of poverty and recovery from the war, new revue companies emerged, classics of the genre reprised and new revues enjoyed increasing success until the decline of the genre in the 1960s.

Copla songs became popular component of many theatre shows during the Second Republic, the Spanish Civil War and the dictatorship. Many songs were composed specifically for theatre shows, and later would become popular in movie versions, such as Rafael de León's *María de la O*, or Antonio Quintero's *Morena clara*, both in 1936 (Reina, 2009, pg. 43). Copla songs find their first musical foundations in folkloric forms like pasodoble and flamenco, and are mainly differentiated from those musical forms by their theatrical quality. The popular songform of Copla combines the telling of a story within a short narrative of only a few minutes; the story is a self-contained narrative made of a beginning, a climax and an end. In addition, its harmonic language consists of the use of features like the Phrygian mode and melodic ornaments like melisma (Román, 2000). The narratives of Copla songs were initially

"The fairly paid" in *The Copla Musical*, 2014.
Photo: John Kentish

"But I love you anyway" in *The Copla Musical*, 2014.
Photo: Vera Rodríguez

inspired by old romances popularized by blind storytellers. From the beginning of the twentieth century, these narratives were set to music and their popular themes eventually acquired more sophisticated ideas when poets addressed or critiqued for instance the abuses of power, enhanced traditions and landscapes, everyday stories of love, jealousy, and disillusion, or exposed religious beliefs. In the late 1920s-early 1930s, Copla became a dominant genre in Spain's intellectual, political, artistic or sexual spheres in cafes and cabarets, primarily because of its openness, cosmopolitanism, and mix of social classes. (Reina, 2009, pg. 29)

Throughout Franco's dictatorship (1939-75) Copla became a discourse in which there was an approximation to staging gender roles, represented by well-defined stereotypes. Copla was a mass phenomenon popular on both factions of the war, so the Fascist propaganda appropriated and manipulated it as they did with many other Republican symbols. Under the Regime's manipulation, Copla could lead hungry and misfortunate people through an illusion of triumph, and also help the Regime financially via the production of films featuring these popular songs. The mise en scene of Copla numbers was of great importance in these songs and only women with National-Catholic virtues would be allowed to go on stage, especially when they sung about passions less easy to tolerate (Zurián, 2005). But satisfied with the strong conservative images presented by Copla singers, censors forgot about other possibilities of identification (such as those experienced by homosexual collectives silenced during the dictatorship) with the melodramatic narratives and emotions of the Copla lyrics.

Despite the popularity of Copla in Spain, theorists and musicologists have not yet defined the form in relation to other song styles and musical genres from other countries. But given the increasing sensitivity toward Anglophone musical theatre imports in Spain, I have established a historical comparison between Copla and Musical Theatre produced in Britain and America with views to facilitate the intercultural exploration proposed in my project *The Copla Musical*.

1.2. Dominant American Paradigms: Historical parallels between Tin Pan Alley Musical Revues and Copla

The peak of popularity of American musical comedy, which historians label as Tin Pan Alley, happened concurrently to the golden age of Copla songs in Spain (1940s-50s). Both musical theatre forms are indebted to melodrama, whose essence relies on the putting together of song and drama, and both evidence similarities in how song and narrative integrates. However, their historical development is different because Tin Pan Alley songs fed the growing industry of early Broadway in a manner unlike the development of Copla songs, which mainly popularized through radio but dissociated from their dramatic contexts.

Despite the theatricality of their music, Copla songs did not integrate into plot-driven shows in the way that Tin Pan Alley songs did: Cole Porter's *Anything Goes* (1934), Irving Berlin's *Annie get your gun* (1946). However, Copla songs formed part of revues and folkloric shows and their self-contained narratives were normally delivered in very melodramatic ways. Moreover, the afterlife of Copla continued in the cinematic treatment, as it also happened with Tin Pan Alley as these songs filled the early Hollywood film musicals. Thus, Copla and Tin Pan Alley shared a historical timeframe that marked the beginning of the uninterrupted development of the American musical into the integrated musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein and beyond. Musical director and academic Millie Taylor defines integration in this context as:

> A particular construction of materials that implies, among other things, an evolution of musical theatre towards an ever-increasing focus on linear narrative as the defining feature of the combined musico-dramatic text (2012, pg. 4)

1.3. The Book Musical and the Integration of Song into Narrative Plot Structures

In American musical theatre, the integration of song and plot in what is commonly known as "the book" is of conflicted nature. Theatre historian Scott McMillin specifies in his theory of the "integrated musical" that "all elements of a show –plot, character, song, dance, orchestration

and setting– should blend together into a unity" known as the book. (2006, pg. 1) Historian Peter H. Riddle defines "the book" as

> the overall package of plot, dialog and characterization, and the way in which these elements are combined and interrelated. The actual dialog and lyrics are combined into the working script, called the libretto (2003, pg. 28).

Parallel processes towards integration happened in Spain and America from 1920s to 1950s. In New York, collaborations at the Princess Theatre started to change the course of American musical theatre in the early 1920s to the creation of *Show Boat* (1927) and *Oklahoma* (1943), providing landmark moments in the integrated book-based form of musical theatre. But historical conditions similar to those which accompanied the development of the integrated form of musical in America cannot be observed in developments of the Copla during Franco's era. Franco's political influencing prioritized spectacle (singing and dancing) at the expense of plot, as Spanish singing and dancing were considered more essential for the enhancement of the Spanish virtue (Ruiz Barrachina, 2008). In Spain, teams made of a composer, a lyricist and a librettist (such as the famous trios Quintero, León and Quiroga or Valerio, Solano and Ochaíta) started to write Spanish musical comedies featuring simplistic plots that loosely connected musical numbers through a thematic argument.

Consequently, we might hypothesise that an integrated form of Copla did not develop partly because of socio-political, artistic and economical reasons. The integration of songs in Spanish musical comedies and revues was somehow disrupted in its early development and a number of Copla songs that originally belonged to the first musical comedies were left exclusively to be broadcasted in radio and to be reused in other cabaret and shows.

1.4. Jukebox musicals: a successful formula of integration

Jukebox musicals are musicals that re-use popular songs that have proven to be successful in other media by placing a selection of them in new settings to contribute to a new plot. (Taylor, 2012) The idea of using

familiar songs in a stage production dates back to *The Beggar's Opera* of 1728, sometimes considered to be the first musical in British theatre history. The songs in jukebox musicals are contextualized into a dramatic plot, by re-using popular songs in new settings, which allow some awareness and identification.

In my proyect *The Copla Musical* I integrate pre-released early twentieth-century Copla songs into a linear narrative. By interpolating the self-contained narrative nature of these songs into a new plot, I encounter the tension of combining the inner story of the songs and the outward plot of the musical that the songs are meant to move forward. If this project was developed in Spain, it would adjust to the definition of a jukebox musical, given the potential of these songs to bring personal associations or nostalgia to Spanish audiences who are in tune with their early history. However, Copla songs are often totally unknown to non-Spanish audiences who cannot relate to any prior knowledge or experience of those songs; so this project is conceived away from populism and audience preconceptions and locates this intercultural experiment both in the exchanges among the creative team (made of Spanish and non-Spanish artists) and between them and the audience.

2. Intercultural Franework: Models of Reference

The Copla Musical involves creating and staging a musical theatre piece through an intercultural adaptation. The process involves the integration of a number of Spanish Copla songs into a newly created plot, in an attempt to mirror the form of dominant paradigms of Anglophone musical theatre (book musical, jukebox) as a means of locating the site where intercultural processes occur. This practice is predicated on a number of theoretical principles expressed in Ferdinand Ortiz's transcultural model (1940, in Taylor 1991), Patrice Pavis' hourglass model (1990) and its subsequent critique by Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert (2002).

Ortiz's transcultural model advocates for keeping visible identities (in our case, Spanish and English) while looking for an equal exchange between cultures. *The Copla Musical* aims to position the visibility of a source culture (Copla) within the context of a dominant Anglophone musical theatre culture, and aims to keep an equal balance between both identities. However, this exchange is located and developing in

London, where musical theatre is overtly popular and Copla is not particularly known as an art form. This fact affects the relationship between source and target cultures in the development and presentation of this practice. However, the multicultural population of a city like London in 2015 automatically generates a diversity of backgrounds in an audience that comes from Spanish, English and other cultural settings; and even if British audiences are a majority, London's idiosyncrasy grants a voice to cultural minorities.

The positioning of intercultural exchanges within the audience is strongly defended by Lo and Gilbert (2002). Their view is that this exchange should ideally occur at the same level in order to attempt a more equal basis for exchange. Copla songs embody cultural values that relate to local or indigenous knowledge of Spain's culture and traditions. And while it is important to stay true to the original songs in style, content and form, true intercultural communication is only possible by "changing the mode of readability from one culture to the other" (Pavis, 1992, pg. 205). Thus, in *The Copla Musical* I explore ways for Copla songs to become accessible for a contemporary British audience.

Patrice Pavis' intercultural model uses the metaphor of an hourglass through which he explains the layers of intercultural immersion of a foreign source culture melting into a receiving target culture and also being determined by it. (Pavis, 1992, pg. 5) *The Copla Musical* explores the undertones of Spanish folklore and what Copla music is, with aims to transport audiences who may have never encountered this form of Spanish folklore or be familiar with the Spanish Civil War, to 1939 Spain. Differently to previous British musicals, *The Copla Musical* does not use English actors to play Spanish characters, but Spanish actors to play Spanish characters and English actors to play native English-speaking characters. The combination of cultural backgrounds in the cast facilitates an intercultural approach instantiated within the creative team.

The Copla Musical aims to unite the practice of the Spanish author with the concerns of a multicultural British audience. Musical theatre is now witnessing a new era characterized by intercultural experimentation and for the first time, Spanish Copla is translated for British audiences and not exclusively vice versa, what suggests a turn around in power relations. The project supports an intercultural exchange made

possible by an intercultural team of theatre artists for a cosmopolitan audience located in London.

3. *The Copla Musical*: Articulating Musical Theatre Paradigms Through Intercultural Pratice

The intercultural creation of a modern Copla musical is an innovative process to throw light on fundamental principles of creating musicals in a globalized twenty-first century market. By doing so, this article identifies the discourses of dramaturgy and performance style in the context of the dominant paradigms of musical theatre produced in America and Britain, and how my intercultural approach explores potentially new ways to the create new musical theatre by way of combining an indigenous Spanish songform and mainstream Anglophone musical theatre traditions.

The development of this musical theatre project generates questions that challenge, renew or complement current theory about intercultural adaptation (Pavis, 1990; Lo and Gilbert, 2002; Taylor, 1991). The debates occurring between these theorists involve the relationships between practice, theory and history, particularly in reference to east-west relationships and rarely cover exchanges that are fully placed in the western world (Pavis, 1990; Fischer-Lichte, 1990), where political dynamics of dependence and control are not as marked. I am defining an intercultural musical as a hybrid form that borrows from integrated and non-integrated models (book musicals, revues, jukebox musicals), which are found in dominant paradigms in the canon of British and American musical theatre.

Using case study examples from various periods of British and American musical theatre, I will try and demonstrate how the composers and lyricists of those shows exercised dramaturgical principles which obtained to integrated (book musical) or non-integrated (revues, jukebox) musical theatre styles: these informing principles and their relating case studies are outlined in this chapter in relation to the dramaturgical principles that I use myself to create *The Copla Musical*.

3.1. Dramaturgical Principles

The process of integrating Copla songs into a narrative plot requires a deconstruction and rearrangement of elements of the songs so that they would convey specific dramatic goals within the whole of the play. Non-integrated twentieth-century musicals such as early American musical comedies or Copla variety shows had a very loose structure, which allowed comics and entertainers to perform as co-creators. (Kirle, 2005, pg. 20) However, during the development of the integrated musical, the composer and writer, working collaboratively, represented the norm, and resulted in the privileging of a story-telling structure wherein songs and music furthered the drama. Copla songs belong to a historically dated period and were more or less presented in tact as part of the genre of musical revues or cabaret-style. Therefore, in order to execute this intercultural experiment I referred to the abovementioned models of integration: the revue (acting as point of departure from which to develop a narrative), the book-based musical (suggesting a narrative frame to aspire to), and the jukebox musical (providing a method of integration of pre-existing popular songs in a presentational format). The discussion that follows will describe some essential dramaturgical principles from musical revues, book-based and jukebox musicals and how they were addressed in this intercultural experiment:

• In the book-based integrated form of musical theatre, dramatic action is tightly linked to intention and character; a dramatic plot is thus driven by and revealed primarily through character actions. Copla songs express feelings in order to move the listener rather than convey the through-line of a dramatic narrative. So if used in their original state, such songs would tend to stop the action. To instate some kind of dramatic intention or drive in the Copla songs, I let the songs comment on important actions and reveal some key data about characters. For instance, the opening number of *The Copla Musical* "Jailer of the port" is originally a lament where a singer expresses his misery in prison:

> *I'd rather die than go on living; I'd rather drown than go on breathing*
> *I'm watching the ships sail gently; I'm watching the world escape me*
> *Behind walls… in the port Santa María* (*The Copla Musical*, 2011)

I interpolated new meanings in the song to set up the dramatic situation, one of the key functions of songs that are placed in the first part of integrated book-based musical theatre. The lead character of *The Copla Musical*, a Republican ally named La Gitana sings this song at the start of the show so the audience understands what the setting is and the personal circumstances and state of being of our lead character.

• The plot of the musical must be able to reduce to a theme, and might be accompanied by subplots giving room to different situations and double reactions. The main theme in *The Copla Musical* is the search for identity and freedom, explored through the main character's personal and political journey to self-discovery, but other themes interweave in our story: the political effects set by the division of the Spanish Civil War into family relationships and comradeship in a political context, and cross-dressing as a means of sexual liberation. These themes represent accurate societal and political views from the Spanish Second Republic and subsequent Fascist dictatorship, and cultural values displayed in Copla songs. But there are other themes propelled by the inclusion of a foreign character and his initiative of moving settings to America, such as the rise to stardom and romance as an escapist veneration towards the unknown. These themes are a result of the potential interaction with a new culture.

• Music expands and therefore utilises dramatic time duration of the piece, so dialogue must condense. Copla songs are self-contained narratives and have on average a fixed duration of three or four minutes; in *The Copla Musical* we expand on the time that the music of Copla songs normally take up (intros, exit music) and underscore scenes with musical motifs from the songs. In view of the principles of dramaturgy I describe, in the process of inserting and adapting songs I often interpolate narrative details that many lyrics do not supply in their original versions. To that end, I also add dialogue before and after musical numbers while using music to engage and anticipate dramatic situations. Dialogue however is normally kept to a minimum, again adhering to the dramaturgical principle of book musicals that music in itself achieves dramatic purpose, revealing inner thoughts of characters as good as (if not better than) words. Further to serving the dramatic narrative, I also make sure the pace of the drama matches the general tempi of the songs.

• Character is revealed through the songs that probe the character's psyche, and through confronting conflicts within the dialogue of the

"Farewell España" in *The Copla Musical*, 2014. Photo: John Kentish

"Sorrow" in *The Copla Musical,* 2014. Photo: Vera Rodríguez

scenes. Dramatic development in musicals is considerably more compacted into a shorter time frame than plays; hence there is a need to immediately identify the character's attitude and point of view. Secondary characters may provide contrast with the lead. The musical comedy conventions of the 1920s presented the secondary romantic leads (the soubrette and her paramour) as comic relief until *Oklahoma!* (1943) and *Carousel* (1945) added more depth to these roles. In *The Copla Musical*, characters represent a mixture of Spanish and non-Spanish melodrama stereotypes: lead character La Gitana is a gypsy transvestite that faces political and gender conflicts; her mother replicate the Spanish stereotype of the long suffering companion from traditional folkloric movies; fellow drag artist Pincho is an antagonist femme fatale also presented in the form of a transvestite; Campanera is a Republican fighter that represents the archetype of the hero; and both factions of the Spanish Civil War, Republicans and Nationals represent alternatively comrades and villains. Schism is set from the beginning of the musical. There is an American character that becomes the bridge between the original folklore and its re-interpretation. This character is influenced by whom he meets and what he sees, and he experiences the most distinct dramatic arc of all of the characters. Through the English-speaking character, who brings the cultural perspectives of a foreigner, an audience who is also (in a sense) "foreign" to that world, might in a sense empathise and therefore view the dramatic world of Copla through this character. He is a culture bearer, another chain in the transfer of knowledge because audiences can relate to him. His performance of Copla most clearly involves an intercultural approach.

3.2. Music and Lyrics

In integrated musicals, music must ultimately serve the drama, and perhaps at times become subservient to it. Songs too have to develop story, mood and themes, as well as communicate dramatic narrative. Copla songs are self-contained dramatic stories, unlike the ensemble numbers or comedy songs that are regularly found in musical theatre. The main challenge of this intercultural project was to select and transform a series of pre-existing Copla songs into an original libretto (written in English) yet maintain the style of these songs. The selection and location

of songs (in the sequence of dramatic events) also have an impact on the characters of *The Copla Musical* because of the song's pre-existing narratives. Accordingly, the lyrics were changed in order to fit the narratives proposed by the libretto.

3.2.1. Lyric adaptations

In the process of transforming original Copla songs into an English musical theatre version, I collaborated with a British lyricist. First, I took the lead in translating on the original Copla song from Spanish to English suggesting the key identifying cultural elements and encoded and essential meanings in each selected song. Afterwards, in dialogue with the British lyricist we negotiated the linguistic translation conscious of the working process and whose interests the translated work ultimately served; that is, questioning the original meaning of songs (discovering that in many instances this still remained unclear) and aiming for a dramatic adaptation that would add to the dramatic narrative of the story. Effective lyric writing greatly depends on specificity – that is, that songs and their lyrics are particular to a dramatic situation and therefore not only propel the plot but also illuminate a significant dramatic conflict. Conventionally good lyric writing also demands effective mastery of poetry and rhyming, grammar, prosody, metrics, structure and sensibility. Most of these characteristics are defined by the cultural context in which the work is to be presented. Thus, at the end of this collaborative process of adaptation I abandoned some aspects of my translation to welcome an intercultural version that reads better in front of an English-speaking audience.

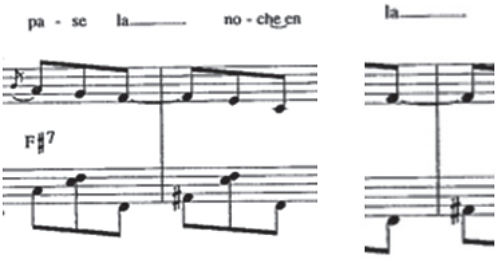
The relationship of music and lyrics works differently in British and Spanish cultures. So what happens to linguistic concepts that resist translation or adaptation? Which language carries the cultural authority? The key of this practice consists in finding a balance between the exchanging cultures, so elements from both cultures remain visible and sensitive to the receptivity of a cosmopolitan and multicultural British audience. A native English-speaking British lyricist helped me negotiate cultural representation and authority in order to establish that balance. However, music integrated into a strong visual field is not easily disassociated from its original intentions. Apart from words, music

contains meta-dramatic elements that signify dramatic intent. Musical elements from Copla songs (such as pitches, chords and musical motifs) help contextualize situation and characters, and create additional layers of subtext that may guide an audience's reception of the various dramatic elements in a musical.

3.2.2. Song structures

Understanding Copla music and the adaptation of these songs requires both musical and cultural knowledge. The musical director's analysis of the songs musical properties added new layers to the interpretative process that expanded upon the potential richness of Copla, sensitive to the notion that a song expresses what words alone cannot. Throughout the development of *The Copla Musical* from 2011 to 2014, musical directors from different backgrounds have enriched the piece with a variety of layers.

Vassula Delli, 2012 musical director of *The Copla Musical* advocated for the use of Spanish rhythms and ornaments to help establish the visibility of the Copla songs. Delli, a native Greek citizen, came from a background of Greek folklore relatively similar to Copla. She develo-



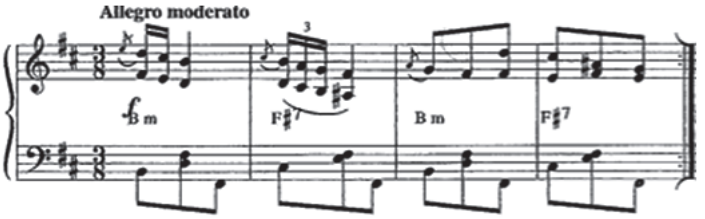
ped a quick understanding for the form and prioritized enhancing its defining features. For instance, for the opening song "Jailer of the port" Delli encouraged emphasizing the third beat in the triplets in favour of the natural flamenco rhythm of "Bulería". This affected the English prosody of the lyrics when linking the last and first syllables of subsequent triplets to accentuate some words, as it is done in the Spanish original (see example below).

2013 British Musical Director David Merriman had a different approach to the work. Merriman came from a strictly musical theatre background and applied his knowledge to help the readability of *The Copla Musical* as a musical theatre piece in Britain. This reflected, for instance, in the structure of some songs. Referring back to our prior example, the original structure of "Jailer of the port" is: two verses, a bridge and a chorus (AABC), quite a common structure in Copla. The atypical characteristic of this song is that we only hear this structure once through, despite the commonality of repetition of the refrain in many Copla songs. However, Merriman decided to add another chorus at the end, slightly changing the song's structure to AABCC. Additionally, during the performance, the song would be dramatically interrupted before reaching the end for the following reasons:

> 1. Merriman considered that many Copla songs originally did not have what he defined as a "button" (i.e. a definitive ending), and decided to structure the songs in such a way as to discourage applause at the end of them.
> 2. Alternatively, he suggested that a new character should interrupt the song thus propelling dramatic action and finding an economical way of using music as a device to define character.

He argued that "by changing lyrics of original songs, it is natural to assume that music is subject to be altered too" (Merriman, 2013), which helps the team's awareness towards maintaining both culture's visibility.

Copla songs have many different structures influenced by other folkloric song-forms such as pasodobles, zambras, chotis, etc. in a similar way than Tin Pan Alley songs were also influenced by American folk music such as jazz or ragtime. However, there are some structural patterns that can be found in both Copla and Tin Pan Alley songs. As happens in most Western popular music, there is repetition of different musical elements (motific, rhythmic, melodic). In Tin Pan Alley songs the most common structure, a thirty-two bar chorus, frequently divides into an AABA scheme such as in songs like "Blue skies" or "I got a kick out of you". Alternatively, there is usually an instrumental introduction that anticipates themes from the songs, or offers an original evocative melody to set an atmosphere. The guitar introduction of the opening number "Jailer of the port" (see example below) runs the chorus and



establishes the tonic in a major mode (which is the same mode of the chorus), even though the rest of the song is minor. These introductions might be used as underscoring as well as to evoke and remind of dramatic moments during the piece.

3.3. The Performance of English Copla

Cultural understanding shapes the interpretation of songs. Spanish and British performers develop distinct interpretative qualities given their training and cultural influences, so they need to find their personal approach to Copla. For British performers, it is helpful to know the source of Copla songs, however mimesis is not a useful tool in this intercultural process. If actors apply their own skills to singing English Copla, they will develop more nuanced, textured and interesting performances. Eugenio Barba defines inculturation "as the process of passive sensory-motor absorption of the daily behaviour of a given culture" (1991, pg. 219). A performer's adaptation to a foreign culture involves a gradual and organic transformation, which is also a reflection of their growing cultural awareness. Ian Sanderson is an actor who has been involved in *The Copla Musical* since 2011. By 2013, he has developed a stronger sense and understanding of Copla which helps his performance of it. Even though the experience of performing English Copla might be more visceral for Spanish performers because of their history, English performers are modified through their contact with another culture, and are transported to something unique, unusual and specific. Richard Schechner argues that

> to perform someone else's culture takes a knowledge, a "translation" that is different, more viscerally experiential, than translating a book. Intercultural exchange takes a teacher: someone who knows the body

> of performance of the culture being translated. The translator of the culture is not a mere agent, as a translator of words might be, but an actual culture-bearer (1991, pg. 314).

The Copla Musical is full of culture-bearers. From the author and performers from a Spanish background who are familiar with the tradition of Copla, to the lyricists, musical director and performers who come from an Anglophone musical theatre background. We all complement each other in this intercultural exchange and meet half way to find out what English Copla might be, and how it should be performed.

3.4. The Reception of the Project

Musical theatre works are "constantly reinvented as products of their socio-cultural moments" (Kirle, 2005, pg. 75). Therefore, we must consider the historical moment in which a production is created because it will inform the ways in which audiences are inclined to receive the work. In this section I will discuss the socio-cultural conditions that affected principles of expression in the writing of Copla songs in relation to the current context that has encouraged the creation of *The Copla Musical* and its theoretical framework, which results from a contemporary cultural and artistic moment.

Copla during the "Franquismo" years represented a series of National-Catholic values. But in the political climate of a globalized twenty-first century, Copla songs register a new significance, especially when they enter in contact with other cultures. In twenty-first century London, *The Copla Musical* reincarnates the female passion through the voice of a transvestite, and applies several concepts from melodrama to the plot, such as a gay presence within a conservative family and impossible love stories. A male transvestite now subverts the national-catholic virtues that Franco's Regime attributed to female Copla performers. This subversion of gender accentuates a double game which began in the 1950s performance of Copla that the Regime was not aware of or opted to ignore: that homosexual collectives adopted these songs as a means of expression, especially in times of repression. This reinterpretation is an opportunity to make more explicit, and therefore explore, the historical

appropriation of the female Copla performer that was part of the 50s homosexual milieu.

The newly conceived English Copla is a form resulting of an intercultural collaboration that takes into account the identity of the artists, their connections to the source culture, the characteristics of Copla itself, and the outside world in which the good is exchanged, that is, twenty-first century London. British audiences might perceive Copla sung in Spanish as more authentic; according to Professor Raymond Knapp "the interest in the culture and traditions of "the other" helps reaffirm America and Britain's more advanced level of civilization" (2004). But if actors sung all songs in *The Copla Musical* in Spanish, British audiences would probably not understand entirely or be able to follow the narrative.

The reception of *The Copla Musical* varied in different sectors of the audiences who attended performances of the musical. I defined aspects of that reception through modes of acceptance or rejection of the intercultural product. Interculturalism by its hybridist nature will attract a hybrid response from all audiences, including that of the country from which borrowings are made. This project is defined by a British target culture and per extension a multicultural immigrant audience, but it does not deform the Spanish source culture as some preservationists might imply; much to the contrary, by speaking in the language of a dominant culture, Spanish culture presents and exports a visible identity.

Twenty-first century London is a multicultural site of convergence that allows revaluation and contextualisation of Copla's renewed development in history. This requires an intercultural exploration of adaptation processes, and therefore a need to reassess the relationship of Spanish folklore and culture to foreign influences and ultimately a renegotiation or subversion of elements from the converging cultures. A multicultural approach can encourage artists to explore ways to engage an audience's preconditioned reception of a culture that may be foreign and familiar at the same time (Spanish Copla and also book-based musical theatre). However, it is impossible for people from one culture to apprehend a genre from another culture in its original form. In *The Copla Musical* a few original Spanish elements are preserved on songs, but the overall outcome of the practice is to explore what happens when Copla is reimagined in an international context, for a multicultural audience who may be receptive simultaneously to multiple aspects of the musical. The increasingly mixed cultural make-up of urban centres locates the

intercultural experience no longer exclusively on the stage but within the audience itself.

4. Final Remarks

The Copla Musical is an intercultural experiment, resulting from the crossing of elements embedded in the writing and performance skills of British and Spanish practitioners. The re-imagination of Copla sought intercultural adaptation as a method to reengage with traditional cultural codes, which are made relevant by their subversion, and through that, their reinvention in an intercultural musical for a cosmopolitan society. The codes embedded in Copla songs no longer respond to a perceived social reality. Although Copla is nostalgically performed and cherished in Spain, the writing of Copla correlated with a certain socio-cultural zeitgeist, and aspects of that cultural world are no longer sustained and therefore have absented the form for musical theatre writing. One way to rejuvenate the form is through an intercultural process. Through experimentation and rejuvenation with ideas and forms from a dominant culture, I explored the possibility of a form like Copla undergoing an international renaissance, and through this process, engaging with the issues of globalisation and the newly emerging forms of intercultural musical theatre.

This process also probed the notion of cultural sensitivity through the complex dialogue already inherent in collaborative and performance styles. Through addressing cultural sensitivity, I sought to render transparent the challenges and solutions that pertain to one of the intercultural principles I pursued: that of maintaining cultural visibility on both sides of the cultural dialogue and identifying cultural frames of reference. In this manner, an outcome in terms of the product was to make implicit the artistic values that are historically linked to Copla. Another outcome was to reengage with socio-cultural values established during the artistic censorship of Franco's regime. By subverting such values through the adaptation process, the project resonates with contemporary socio-cultural contexts.

As of today, there is not a category to fit *The Copla Musical*; that is why I have crossed cultural borders to find a place for this project while I questioned what musical theatre is from an intercultural position. The

practice has generated questions that challenge, renew or complement current theory about intercultural adaptation through the development of this musical theatre project. The hybrid and modernised Copla Musical highlights my process of intercultural adaptation, a phenomenon that not only defines the emergence of new forms of musical theatre but also emphasizes how present-day imports of mega-musicals exert a strong influence on the development of localised forms of musical theatre. This phenomenon seems to mirror the way that the popular genre generally developed, through appropriations of new forms and functions from other local and foreign cultures. This intercultural experiment highlights new dynamics of collaboration and creativity, and in a modernised context also illuminates one way forward for intercultural musical theatre by giving voice to cultures that can complement and expand the creative possibilities within the dominant musical theatre industry.[1]

5. Notas

1 For further documentation on *The Copla Musical*, please visit: www.thecoplamusical.com

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