

1. Music Criticism and the Phonosphere: Discursive Threads and Performative Events in Spain (1830-1870)

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Can music criticism be used to reconstruct the soundscape of 19th-century urban spaces? At first glance, the answer seems to be yes: if we want to know what theatres, squares or streets sounded like, journalistic texts discussing music should give us that insight. However, an analysis of early Spanish music criticism reveals that the relationship between critical texts and the sound phenomenon is more complex than this answer suggests. Following Karel Volniansky (2021), if we understand the phonosphere as a concept operating simultaneously on two levels — the totality of acoustic phenomena in a given physical place, and the sound sphere of a conceptual entity or system — the central methodological problem is to determine which level each element of the critical text documents. This paper proposes that identifying differentiated discursive threads in criticism can provide the linguistic indicators necessary to access these levels.

The case of Joaquín Espín y Guillén (1812–1881) — founder of *La Iberia Musical* (1842), later *La Iberia Musical y Literaria* (1842–1846), as well as author of all the musical entries in the *Enciclopedia Moderna* (1851–1855) — allows us to examine this question with particular clarity. In fact, his work combines critical practice with the lexicographical codification of musical vocabulary. In the opera reviews published by Espín in his magazine, at least two intertwining discursive threads can be identified that never become confused. The first is an evaluative-aesthetic thread, the central terms of which ("effect", "philosophical", "sublime", "expression", and so on) form part of a transnational vocabulary that Espín imports, at least in part, from Paris — sometimes through textual plagiarism — and applies it operationally to the performances he reviews. This vocabulary would later be codified by Espín in the form of definitions in the *Enciclopedia Moderna* and incorporated into later music dictionaries, such as that of Carlos José Melcior (1859). The linguistic indicators in this thread provide access to the phonosphere, which is understood as a conceptual sound sphere: the repertoire of perceptual categories, culturally constructed and imported, that shape what we might call "literate listening" (Jerrold Levinson). Rather than documenting what was heard in a theatre on a particular night, they reveal the framework within which sound became a meaningful experience.

The second thread is technical, circumstantial and performative in nature. For example, when Espín points out that the horns lacked "unity of chiaroscuro" in a specific performance, or that the military band "did not enter on time", these words provide access to the phonosphere, which is defined as the totality of acoustic phenomena in a given place. In this case, the place is the Teatro del Circo in Madrid in the 1840s. These observations do not stem from any imported model and cannot be lexicalized in any dictionary. What distinguishes Espín as a source is that this second thread is not limited to the sound produced on stage. Perhaps as a consequence of his political stance, which is close to progressivism, his position as a publicist leads him to conceive of the show as a performative event (Guy Spielmann), in which the audience is an active participant, rather than a passive receiver of sound. The reviews in *La Iberia Musical* systematically document the acoustic participation of the audience: the applause, the boos, the silence and the murmurs of disapproval. Espín's audience builds tension, explodes in applause, demands encores, silences with its clamour or condemns with its coldness. They are a component of the phonosphere, not mere recipients of sound.

However, it should be noted that this distinction between discursive threads does not exhaust the complexity of the problem. Each critic produces a different text about the same event, not only because they select different threads, but also because their position in the acoustic space conditions what they hear, their memory selectively reconstructs the event, and their literate listening filters perception in different ways. The critical text is not a record of the phonosphere, but rather the product of these various overlapping mediations. Understanding this variety of factors is crucial for anyone looking to use music criticism to reconstruct the urban sound environment of the 19th century.

2. Do sources have opinions? Ontological Modeling, Language Models, and Epistemic Structure in Historical Musical Texts

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The phenomenology of listening, the aesthetics of reception, and the affective and bodily turns (Abbate, Le Guin) have emphasized that evaluative, emotional, and normative dimensions are constitutive of the musical experiences documented in sources. However, in research practice, these dimensions are often treated as incidental. That is, when analyzing verbal texts about music, these dimensions are typically considered what the text "also says," rather than what the text "is." The problem becomes more acute when attempting to reconstruct historical phonospheres from written verbal sources because most of what our sources say about music is factual rather than judgmental, normative, or prescriptive. Despite this disparity, this session starts from the premise that 19th-century verbal texts on music not only describe what resonates but also prescribe how it should sound, judge how it has sounded, and even regulate how it should be experienced. Based on this observation, the intervention raises two problems. The first is a problem of scale: the intertwining of what happened and the judgment of what happened (examined in the previous session) is not an idiosyncratic feature of Espín y Guillén's criticism, but rather a constituent feature of all 19th-century verbal music documentation. The second is a methodological problem: What tools do we have to treat this non-descriptive dimension as a structure to be analyzed? What do the digital humanities—particularly ontological modeling and Large Language Models (LLMs)—offer to address what we might call "opinion" in our sources?

The procedure presented in this session was developed in the LexiMus-Unirioja project and articulates three strategies. The first strategy is propositional analysis, in which each textual unit (e.g., a dictionary entry or a music review) is broken down into its constituent propositional assertions. Each assertion is then given qualifiers that specify its epistemic status: modal force (e.g., does it state, prescribe, prohibit, or tolerate?), polarity, temporal scope, condition, frequency, and manner. The second strategy is ontological modeling, in which each assertion is formalized as a semantic triplet (subject-predicate-object) within a knowledge graph with controlled vocabulary. The third strategy involves using LLMs (Claude Opus 4.6 in this case), which allows the procedure to be executed at the corpus level. LLMs can read 19th-century Spanish prose, recognize the epistemic operations it contains, and formalize them according to a protocol designed by the researcher. Neither classical natural language processing (rule-based) nor text mining (based on statistical distributions) can do this. Needless to say, this implies a paradigm shift that does not consist of machines replacing humanists. Rather, the dichotomy that has structured the digital humanities for decades—in-depth qualitative analysis that does not scale versus quantitative analysis that scales but loses depth—is no longer operative.

When applied to Carlos José Melcior's *Diccionario enciclopédico de la música* (1859), the procedure produced a corpus of over 11,000 extracted propositions. When applied as a transferability test to the Espín corpus discussed in the previous session, we find that music criticism, a privileged source for studying the phonosphere, contains even more judgment than the dictionary. Unlike the dictionary, criticism contains direct phonospheric elements (e.g., applause, voices in space, vocal deterioration), albeit within a value-laden grammar. Cross-analysis shows that the two are complementary, not alternative, sources. For example, we will focus on a case study. Melcior's entry "Expression," broken down into 233 propositions, reveals a complete grammar of regulated emotion. Each tempo is assigned a prescribed affect; each instrument, a legitimate expression; and each emotional excess, a codified limit. Midway through the entry, Melcior incorporates a passage from the *Enciclopedia Moderna* (1851–1855), written by Espín y Guillén himself. We will see that the circulation of evaluative vocabulary between criticism and dictionaries is not lexical convergence; rather, it is direct textual circulation, which can be seen as structural data thanks to modeling. This approach allows us to reconstruct historical phonospheres by converting the prescriptive, evaluative, and emotional dimensions of sources into analyzable, quantifiable, and comparable data between textual sources, as well as between genres and eras.