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Zarzuela: Musical Theater Expresses the True Spanish Identity

Rachel Heikkinen

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Most people think of Italy, France, and Germany as the powerhouses of opera, but rarely does one consider the rich musical theater tradition in Spain known as zarzuela. Defining what zarzuela is can be tricky considering the amount of Spanish theatrical works that contain music. Oftentimes, the boundary is blurred between zarzuela and other theatrical genres like *comedias* and *semi-operas*. The line is drawn based on the “amount and function of the music” in the work.¹ There is a wide range of works that are considered zarzuela with many subgenres, but zarzuelas are generally described as light entertainment spectacles of music, dance, and humorous sketches that feature stories of the working-class Spanish society.² William M. Bussey describes the five criteria to be a zarzuela as (1) they normally have two acts, (2) they alternate between song and spoken dialogue, (3) the musical numbers are a substantial part of the performance, (4) the productions are elaborate, and (5) the subject matter focuses on mythology (until the 1760s) and popular culture and daily Madrid life (after the 1760s).³ The caveat to this rather straightforward list is that there exist zarzuelas that do not strictly adhere to all of these guidelines and some operas that fulfill the criteria but are not considered zarzuelas by scholars. It is important to examine every work on a case-by-case basis to determine if a Spanish theatrical work is a zarzuela or not.

The primary focus of this paper will be zarzuelas from the Golden Age of Zarzuela (1850-1950), which revolve around the lives of everyday Spaniards. Stories featuring nannies, police officers, thieves, and other working-class people show a side of Spain that is different from the royalty and politicians that make up the history books. Spain is a country that is divided throughout history into “las dos Españas” (‘the two Spains’). This concept refers to the many

¹ William M. Bussey, *French and Italian Influence on the Zarzuela: 1700-1770* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 9.

² José Luis Temes, *El Siglo de la Zarzuela: 1850-1950* (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 2014), 16.

³ William M. Bussey, *French and Italian Influence on the Zarzuela: 1700-1770* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 12-4.

instances of division between the progressives and conservatives from the Carlist Wars to the Civil War. In spite of the political debate, the real people of Spain are nationalistic and proud of their heritage and traditions. The characters embody the Spanish cultural values and even play into their stereotypes. Zarzuelas typically feature traditional Spanish dances, clothing, and festivals that relate to the stories of the Spanish people. Most zarzuelas also take place in Spain, especially Madrid where the zarzuela originated. As the artist center of the country, Madrid and its streets, parks, and theaters are introduced in zarzuelas as a reference for the local audience who know the city. Every aspect of the production from the setting to the plot to the music radiates the “Spanishness” of the genre.

Zarzuela differs from other European opera genres in several ways. First, zarzuela does not have continuous music but rather musical numbers with interludes of dialogue, like a singspiel.⁴ Also, opera has the socio-esthetic objective to be an intellectual challenge to its audience members, which can often only be understood by intellectuals.⁵ In contrast, zarzuela is a light, comedic art form that can be enjoyed by anyone who understands Spanish. The music in zarzuelas is typically shorter and simpler than in opera arias. While some composers like Tomás Bretón write in the Romantic style mimicking Verdi or Wagner, many composers of zarzuela write simplistic, repetitive melodies. This Populist style appeals to a general audience because the songs can be sung by almost anyone. Compared to operatic works, the music in zarzuela does not develop nearly as much thematically, contrapuntally, or harmonically.⁶ The music does, however, have a Spanish flair due to its form and instrumentation. Composers utilize rhythms from popular Spanish and Latin American dance forms such as the jota, pasodoble, bolero,

⁴ José Luis Temes, *El Siglo de la Zarzuela: 1850-1950* (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 2014), 16.

⁵ Temes, *El Siglo de la Zarzuela*, 17.

⁶ Temes, *El Siglo de la Zarzuela*, 17.

seguidilla, tango, and habanera in order to portray the lively spirit of Spanish culture.⁷ One can also see the influence of flamenco in zarzuela music with instruments like the Spanish guitar and castanets. On stage, dancers wear traditional dresses with mantones, flamenco shawls, and use body percussion like stomping or clapping in imitation of flamenco dancing. Although flamenco originates from Andalucía in the south of Spain, the dance has been trademarked as Spanish and accepted by Spaniards as a reflection of their culture. Flamenco and the other traditional Spanish dance forms distinguish zarzuela from any other European opera genre.

This essay will examine the history and traditions behind zarzuela which contribute to how composers portray the real Spanish identity in their works. Through the analysis of *El barberillo de Lavapiés* by Francisco Asenjo Barbieri and *La Gran Vía* by Federico Chueca, I note the value placed on the working-class people in Madrid and the abomination of Spanish authority and the elite. Zarzuelas show the stories, customs, and values of the everyday people which these composers argue are the true values of Spain. Through the laughter of this humorous medium, zarzuelas reveal the truth about the importance of the lower class to the national Spanish identity.

El Nacimiento y la Muerte de la Zarzuela

Zarzuela formed out of several other theater traditions that converged in Spain in the early seventeenth century. Italian opera was developing at this time, and Italy's close proximity to Spain geographically and linguistically meant that there was a cross-pollination between the two countries and their theater traditions.⁸ Juan de Hidalgo (1614-1685) was a Spanish composer whose early works included recitative passages that mirrored Italian opera tradition. Later,

⁷ Enrique Encabo Fernández, "La Zarzuela y el Folklore Infantil," *Filomusica*, no. 33, Oct. 2002, <https://www.filomusica.com/filo33/encabo.html>.

⁸ William M. Bussey, *French and Italian Influence on the Zarzuela: 1700-1770* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 2.

Hidalgo became one of the most prolific composers of Baroque zarzuela.⁹ The influence of Italy on early Spanish zarzuela can also be seen in the performance aspects. Spanish playwrights borrowed Italian staging techniques that made the sets and productions more extravagant and enticing to audiences.¹⁰

At the beginning of the seventeenth century in Spain, *comedias*, three-act plays in verse that combined tragedy and comedy, were the most popular genre among theatergoers in Spain. Lope de Vega (1562-1635) was the most influential dramatist of *comedias* in the *Arte nuevo* ('New Art') style, meaning he was not restricted to royal topics and could write about any facet of life.¹¹ He wrote about both aristocrats and lower-class individuals in order to reimagine the real world and in his own words, "Imitate the actions of men and portray the customs of the century".¹² Over the course of the early seventeenth century, it became standard to incorporate music into *comedias*.¹³ The role of music in these productions varied from one short song to many large pieces at key points in the plot. The more music that was added, the more these musical *comedias* transformed into their own genre entirely.

The zarzuela tradition began officially in 1658 in the Palacio Real de la Zarzuela, a royal hunting palace outside of Madrid. The word "zarza" refers to the "brambles" which surround the hunting palace, but musically, the "ill-defined and common sort of vegetation" perfectly describes the zarzuela's common, pastoral music and storylines.¹⁴ At the Palacio Real de la

⁹ William M. Bussey, *French and Italian Influence on the Zarzuela: 1700-1770* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 19.

¹⁰ Bussey, *French and Italian Influence on the Zarzuela*, 15.

¹¹ Louise K. Stein, *Songs of Mortals, Dialogues of the Gods: Music and Theatre in Seventeenth-Century Spain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 12.

¹² Félix Lope de Vega, *Arte Nuevo*, 52-3, quoted in Louise K. Stein, *Songs of Mortals, Dialogues of the Gods: Music and Theatre in Seventeenth-Century Spain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 12.

¹³ William M. Bussey, *French and Italian Influence on the Zarzuela: 1700-1770* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 8.

¹⁴ Louise K. Stein, *Songs of Mortals, Dialogues of the Gods: Music and Theatre in Seventeenth-Century Spain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 259.

Zarzuela, Pedro Calderón de la Barca and composer Juan de Hidalgo entertained the Spanish court with the musical comedy *El Laurel de Apolo* which most scholars agree is the first definitive example of Spanish zarzuela.¹⁵ This mythological tale takes place in the countryside around Madrid where four choirs praise the monarchy. Suddenly, Zarzuela, the personification of the genre itself, and a group of peasants arrive wanting to contribute to the praise. The Zarzuela character describes the genre when she says, “It is not a *comedia*, but only / a little fable, / in which, in imitation of Italy, / one sings and acts”.¹⁶ Here, Calderón more or less defines the zarzuela genre, comparing it to the old *comedia* and the new Italian opera traditions while the word “fable” implies the pastoral elements that make zarzuela unique. *El Laurel de Apolo* was the first time that the name “zarzuela” was put to the phenomena of adding music to *comedia* plots in the native Castellano language. Baroque zarzuelas like this that came from the seventeenth century quickly became popular among the court for their light and playful character that was true to the Spanish identity. Zarzuelas were simplistic in comparison to the Italian *opera seria*, but their charm slowly began to catch the attention of the Spanish public as well.

In 1700, King Carlos II of the Habsburgs died without an heir to the throne, so King Felipe V of Bourbon became the next ruler of Spain. Being from France, Felipe V brought with him modern Enlightenment ideas and Italian opera traditions that removed zarzuelas from Spanish theaters for over a century. During this time, Italian operas were primarily performed while the only Spanish works were *tonadillas escénicas*, small-scale anecdotes or jokes sung as a solo on stage.¹⁷ France’s influence was even more prevalent in Spain when Napoleon Bonaparte invaded in 1808, initiating Spain’s war for independence. In 1814, Spain won the war and

¹⁵ Louise K. Stein and Roger Alier, “Zarzuela,” *Grove Music Online*, (2001), <https://proxy.augustana.edu:2138/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.40742>.

¹⁶ Louise K. Stein, *Songs of Mortals, Dialogues of the Gods: Music and Theatre in Seventeenth-Century Spain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 263.

¹⁷ José Luis Temes, *El Siglo de la Zarzuela: 1850-1950* (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 2014), 456.

entered a new age of Romanticism and prosperity under King Fernando VII.¹⁸ After years of conflict with France, the Spanish people wanted to establish their own cultural and musical identity separate from French influences. This age of prosperity and shift in attitude sparked the beginning of the revival movement of modern zarzuela in the new Spain.

Although Fernando VII's rule began a new prosperous era in Spain, it wasn't until his daughter, Isabella II, took the throne that zarzuelas were brought into the forefront of Spanish theater practices. Isabella's coronation in 1833 was not met with the support of the whole country; conservative Spaniards supported Fernando VII's brother, Carlos de Bourbon, after Fernando's death over the liberal Isabella. The divide between the two Spains began the Carlist Wars. Due to the rising conflict throughout the country, Spanish composers did not come together to revive the zarzuela tradition until the mid-nineteenth century. After the first Carlist War ended in 1840, Isabella II remained the queen with an overall more stable government and gradual extension of power among the middle classes.¹⁹ The relative stability in the country allowed young artists to explore, take chances, and reimagine the old zarzuela tradition.

Francisco Asenjo Barbieri (1823-1894) was one of the leaders of the zarzuela revival movement. He studied clarinet, piano, and composition at the Madrid Conservatory and started his career performing in the pit orchestra for Italian operas.²⁰ Barbieri noticed the disconnect between the elite-supported Italian opera and the national Spanish style, so he became interested in Spanish theater as a thing that represented the Spanish people rather than appealing to only the upper class. The National Library in Madrid has Barbieri's notes that describe his research into

¹⁸ José Luis Temes, *El Siglo de la Zarzuela: 1850-1950* (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 2014), 24.

¹⁹ Christopher J. Ross, *Spain 1812-1996: Modern History for Modern Languages* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 18.

²⁰ Christopher Webber, "Francisco Asenjo Barbieri," last modified Oct. 31, 2001, <https://www.zarzuela.net/com/barbieri.htm>.

baroque zarzuela in pursuit of “recover[ing] Spain’s musical heritage”.²¹ As a young and promising composer in the artist capital of Spain, Madrid, Barbieri had the resources and inspiration to dive into the zarzuela past and create a new future.

Barbieri was not alone in the redevelopment of zarzuela. In 1845, Barbieri and a group of talented, young composers in Madrid came together with ideas about how to make theater in Spain more representative of the Spanish identity.²² In 1847, Queen Isabella II publicly supported the foundation of La España Musical: a society of composers in Madrid that fought for the performance of a Spanish opera different from Italian opera.²³ In this short period of political stability, young composers began to build the national identity of Spain through their music. In Barbieri’s first zarzuela, *Jugar con fuego* (1851), Barbieri incorporated Spanish folk music into the score, especially in the large chorus numbers. By doing this, the Spanish people play the most important role in the zarzuela, even more than the protagonists.²⁴ The common Spanish people are the stars of this genre and their ideas about politics, society, and class are the ideals that permeate zarzuela from this time period.

On October 10, 1856 (Queen Isabella II’s birthday), the Teatro de la Zarzuela reopened, and a musical allegory titled *La Zarzuela* by Barbieri, Emilio Arrieta, and Joaquín Gaztambide showcased the attitude of the new generation of Spanish composers about the zarzuela genre.²⁵ Like in Calderón’s *El Laurel de Apolo*, this performance features Zarzuela as a female character that personifies the genre itself. Figures from the *Commedia dell’Arte* tradition, Harlequin and Pierrot represent Italian and French music, and they both attempt to overpower and conquer

²¹ Louise K. Stein, *Songs of Mortals, Dialogues of the Gods: Music and Theatre in Seventeenth-Century Spain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 1.

²² José Luis Temes, *El Siglo de la Zarzuela: 1850-1950* (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 2014), 28.

²³ Temes, *El Siglo de la Zarzuela*, 28-29.

²⁴ Clinton D. Young, *Music Theater and Popular Nationalism in Spain: 1880-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016), 6.

²⁵ Young, *Music Theater and Popular Nationalism*, 7.

Zarzuela. However, Tacón and Figaro, who represent classical Spanish theater, stop them and encourage Zarzuela to grow into her own new genre.²⁶ *La Zarzuela* displays the desire among Spanish composers to develop Spain's own musical theater tradition outside of the influences of Italy and France, which had dominated Spanish theaters for so long. The personification of Zarzuela refers back to the first zarzuela, *El Laurel de Apolo*, but also makes Zarzuela a real person with an identity and a place in Spanish society. Zarzuela embodies the struggle of the Spanish people who have been bogged down by poverty, war between other countries, and internal conflict for centuries. Finally, the stories of the working-class people were put on stage due to the support of the Spanish government and a society that sought a national Spanish identity.

Of course, Isabella II's support for the arts was not enough to run an entire country, and after years of poor leadership, she was exiled from Spain in 1868 in the Glorious Revolution. After this, there were several years of political unrest due to disagreements over who should rule.²⁷ Within a month of the Glorious Revolution, Spain was forced to send soldiers to Cuba in an attempt to regain control of one of its last colonies during the Cuban War. The war efforts included a draft and an increase in taxes which put a large financial burden on the poor people of Spain.²⁸ The First Republic, established in 1873, seemed to be the solution to Spain's political upheavals, but uprisings made this period last less than two years. The political instability and constant conflict make the last quarter of the nineteenth century a time of chaos and suffering in Spain.²⁹ During this period, the zarzuela tradition continued to grow, and the subject matter was often related to the political atmosphere of the time. Some composers would even change out

²⁶ Clinton D. Young, *Music Theater and Popular Nationalism in Spain: 1880-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016), 7.

²⁷ Christopher J. Ross, *Spain 1812-1996: Modern History for Modern Languages* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 25.

²⁸ Ross, *Spain 1812-1996*, 26.

²⁹ Ross, *Spain 1812-1996*, 29.

dialogue and musical numbers in order to keep the humor in the performances in line with the current politics of the day.

The most influential historic moment in the Golden Age of Zarzuela is the War of 1898, also known as *El Desastre* ('The Disaster'). 1898 marked the loss of Spain's last colonies (Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines) and the end of the Spanish Empire. When this happened, there was a lot of pessimism among Spaniards who had already lost so much due to the internal political conflict in Spain. The mindset of the people was that which idealized the past when Spain had control over Latin America and had economic prosperity due to its monopoly on trade there. Spain began a period of regenerationism which sought to find the cause of Spain's decline and remedy those faults. In zarzuela, regenerationism appeared as a shift towards more classical European-sounding music.³⁰ Outside of the music, after 1898, some zarzuelas shifted away from their humorous nature to take a pessimistic approach to the topics of class, society, and national identity. While some remaining characteristics preserve the essence of zarzuela in those works, the operatic music and tragic endings create a different tone to the theatrics on stage.

Zarzuela began its slow decline in Spain after the Civil War in 1939 due to various reasons related to the social changes in Spain during the first few decades of Francisco Franco's regime. During the 1940s, the Spanish people struggled with death and poverty due to Franco's dictatorship which kept Spain isolated from the contemporary world. This decade is known as the "hunger years" because of how common it was to die of starvation and malnutrition.³¹ In these times, the everyday person was not able to afford tickets to the theater, and the artists and

³⁰ Clinton D. Young, *Music Theater and Popular Nationalism in Spain: 1880-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016), 1.

³¹ Christopher J. Ross, *Spain 1812-1996: Modern History for Modern Languages* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 98.

composers of these works were not paid well enough to continue. There became fewer composers even interested in writing zarzuelas because of the hardships that they faced.

Spanish society's view on the zarzuela genre had shifted as well which added to the decline in popularity. Although zarzuela aligned with Spanish nationalism, a founding principle of Franco's rule, the people of Spain did not want to look back on the past. Instead, they wanted to build a new Spain with new theater traditions, like the *revista* ('revue').³² The zarzuela genre had become too saturated with works composed for money-making purposes, but they could not compare to the caliber of music from the classic zarzuelas by composers such as Barbieri or Chueca.³³ From a consumer perspective, it was easier and cheaper to turn to alternative forms of entertainment such as television or soccer matches.³⁴ Although there were a few zarzuelas written after 1950, this date is recognized by most scholars as the end of the Golden Age of Zarzuela because of how few works were made after this date.

Although zarzuelas are not actively being written in the present day, they are still performed in Spain and throughout the world. These light comedic works tell stories that reflect the lives of everyday Spaniards and help explain the cultural values of present-day Spain. Spain's history is riddled with political conflict that has shaped both its culture and art. The idea of "las dos Españas" is one that describes the conflict between small towns and the big cities, the Isabelinos and the Carlists, the Republicans and the Nationalists, and other dualities that are part of Spain's history. The revival of the zarzuela provided an outlet for political satire, social commentary, and humor revolving around this conflict, but it also attempted to unify the divided country into a genre that was purely "Spanish".

³² José Luis Temes, *El Siglo de la Zarzuela: 1850-1950* (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 2014), 103.

³³ José Luis Temes, *El Siglo de la Zarzuela: 1850-1950* (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 2014), 102.

³⁴ José Luis Temes, *El Siglo de la Zarzuela*, 103.

Categorías de la Zarzuela

Under the large umbrella that is zarzuela, there are many subcategories that describe the different types of this Spanish musical theater genre. Like the definition of zarzuela itself, the boundaries of the subgenres are often blurred due to the wide variety of works. A zarzuela may be considered more than one subgenre based on its characteristics and its relationship with other Spanish theatrical works.

The first distinction between the *zarzuela grande* and the *género chico* is based on length alone. The *zarzuela grande* is typically in three acts and about the same duration as a work of Italian opera. Examples of *zarzuela grande* include Francisco Barbieri's *El barberillo de Lavapiés* (1874), Amadeo Vives's *Doña Francisquita* (1923), and Federico Moreno Torroba's *Luisa Fernanda* (1932). After Queen Isabella's reign, composers wanted to take zarzuela as far away from *opera seria* as possible, which meant the creation of the *género chico*. A *género chico* ('little genre') is a one-act zarzuela that lasts only about an hour.³⁵ These shorter works were popular among theatergoers because of their brevity which makes them accessible to everyone. Popular *género chicos* include Federico Chueca's *La Gran Vía* (1886), Tomás Bretón's *La verbena de la Paloma* (1894), and Ruperto Chapí's *La Revoltosa* (1897).

It is easy to confuse the relationship between zarzuela and *género chico* since not every zarzuela is a *género chico* and not every *género chico* is a zarzuela.³⁶ Chueca's *La Gran Vía* is considered a *revista* rather than a zarzuela because of its form, but scholars still study it alongside other zarzuelas. A *revista* is a frivolous musical spectacular that includes smaller acts like vaudeville wherein the music, comedic sketches, and dance numbers do not focus on a

³⁵ José Luis Temes, *El Siglo de la Zarzuela: 1850-1950* (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 2014), 448.

³⁶ José Luis Temes, *El Siglo de la Zarzuela*, 448.

central plotline.³⁷ Rather there are many vignettes that come together with an overarching frame that ties the sketches together.

Other subgenre categories refer to the content of the work such as the *costumbrista* and the *sainete lírico*. The *costumbrista* (‘manners’) is a genre that focuses on the customs of Spain including its cultural traditions, festivals, gestures, and stereotypes.³⁸ An example of this is in Bretón’s *La verbena de la Paloma* which is set during the Verbenas de la Paloma festival. During this religious festival on August 15th, a statue of the Virgin Mary is paraded from the Iglesia de la Paloma to the Plaza de la Cebada in Madrid, and the streets are decorated with banners and lights.³⁹ Other examples of *costumbrismo* elements are the use of folk music and traditional dress. A broader subcategory of zarzuela is the *sainete lírico*. A *sainete* is a short, light, easygoing Spanish theater genre which includes themes such as middle and lower-class relations, social vindication, friendly criticism, satire, and irony.⁴⁰ The addition of the word “lírico” indicates that the work has music and songs. Many zarzuelas are considered *sainete líricos* because this category is so broad. Although many other categories exist which relate to the zarzuela genre like the comic opera, the parody, and the operetta, these terms are more widely used to describe theatrical works from around the world rather than those specifically from Spain.

Los Majos de Lavapiés

Francisco Asenjo Barbieri was an influential composer in the revival movement of the zarzuela in the Golden Age of Zarzuela. One of Barbieri’s most famous zarzuelas, *El barberillo de Lavapiés* (‘*The little barber of Lavapiés*’), premiered in 1874 with its libretto written by Luis

³⁷ José Luis Temes, *El Siglo de la Zarzuela: 1850-1950* (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 2014), 453.

³⁸ José Luis Temes, *El Siglo de la Zarzuela*, 444.

³⁹ “Fiestas de Agosto,” Turismo Madrid, (2022), <https://www.esmadrid.com/fiestas-agosto-madrid-san-cayetano-san-lorenzo-virgen-la-paloma>.

⁴⁰ José Luis Temes, *El Siglo de la Zarzuela: 1850-1950* (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 2014), 454.

Mariano de Larra. This *zarzuela grande* is set in Lavapiés, a neighborhood of Madrid, during the political reign of Carlos III (1759-1788).⁴¹ Carlos III was the son of Felipe V and is known for his many domestic reforms within Spain and his Enlightenment ideals. However, Carlos III's strict authoritative hold on the government was met with resistance in the form of riots from the people who wanted more freedom and less French influence.⁴² The Esquilache riots on March 10, 1766 came in response to the Marquis of Esquilache issuing a proclamation that long cloaks and wide-brimmed hats would be banned, and short capes and three-cornered hats would be required, like in France. Riots ensued with shouts of "Long live Spain" and "Death to Esquilache" until both Esquilache and the king fled to Italy until the chaos calmed down.⁴³ *El barberillo de Lavapiés* includes real historical figures such as Jerónimo Grimaldi, the Chief Minister during the Esquilache riots, and José Moñino, the Count of Floridablanca. Even though other characters in the zarzuela are fictitious and the story never names the Esquilache riots explicitly, the zarzuela clearly makes the connections between this time of political upheaval in Madrid and the intervention of the lower class in politics. What may seem like a silly argument over cloaks and hats was actually an example of the pressure that Spaniards felt to conform to French ideals and customs. The riots showed a reluctance to conform and a desire to preserve Spain's traditions.

El barberillo de Lavapiés centers around four people whose personal lives become entangled in a political uprising to put Count Floridablanca in power as the Chief Minister instead of Jerónimo Grimaldi. The Marquesita ('Marquess') plots the downfall of Grimaldi with a group of rebels, but she has to keep this secret from her fiancé, Don Luis who is the nephew of

⁴¹ Christopher Webber, "El barberillo de Lavapiés," last modified March 24, 1998, <https://www.zarzuela.net/syn/barberil.htm>.

⁴² John Lynch, "Charles III," Encyclopedia Britannica, March 29, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-III-king-of-Spain>.

⁴³ "The Esquilache riots." The Making of Madrid. Feb. 13, 2017. <https://www.themakingofmadrid.com/2017/02/13/cloak-and-dagger/>.

Grimaldi. Don Luis is suspicious of the Marquesita and alerts the Walloon Guards, but they capture the wrong man: Lamparilla, the barber to which the zarzuela is named.⁴⁴ The Marquesita bribes the jailor to set Lamparilla free and turns to her confidant and seamstress, Paloma (also Lamparilla's girlfriend), about her worries. Paloma and Lamparilla make a plan to sneak the Marquesita and Don Luis out of Madrid, but before their plan can come to fruition, the Walloon Guards appear and capture the Marquesita, Don Luis, and Paloma. Just then, Lamparilla appears declaring that Floridablanca has been appointed the Chief Minister and that Don Luis must go into exile because of his relation to Grimaldi. The Marquesita follows Don Luis into exile, but Lamparilla, Paloma, and the rest of the people celebrate the change in power and what it means for their voices to finally be heard in the government.⁴⁵

Many *costumbrismo* musical elements give *El barberillo de Lavapiés* its Spanish flair and clearly establish the Spanish identity of the work. The opening scene begins at the St. Eugene festival where men and women celebrate in the street with vendors and dancing. Here the music is a *pasodoble*, a militaristic dance in 2/4 that is associated with Spanish bullfighting.⁴⁶ *Pasodobles* are common in zarzuelas because they are recognizable to people in and outside of Spain and because of their close relation to flamenco. Other dance forms such as the *seguidilla* in Paloma's introductory song, "Como nací en la calle", and the *jota* in the *Jota de los estudiantes* also originate from Spain.⁴⁷ The *seguidilla* is a lively triple-meter dance that appeared in the works of Lope de Vega, Calderón, and others from the seventeenth century. It remained a common Spanish musical form during the time of the *tonadilla escénica*, and it eventually

⁴⁴ Christopher Webber, "El barberillo de Lavapiés," last modified March 24, 1998, <https://www.zarzuela.net/syn/barberil.htm>.

⁴⁵ Webber, "El barberillo de Lavapiés."

⁴⁶ Yuri Porras, "Music, Text, and *Performing* Cultural Identity in Francisco Barbieri's (1823-1894) *El Barberillo de Lavapiés* (1874)," in *Dissonances of Modernity: Music, Text, and Performance in Modern Spain*, ed. Irene Gómez-Castellano and Aurélie Vialette (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 171.

⁴⁷ Yuri Porras, "Music, Text, and *Performing* Cultural Identity," 171.

became incorporated into *sainetes* and zarzuelas.⁴⁸ These specific dance forms partnered with the actual dancing on stage are associated with Spain, so by using this type of music in *El barberillo de Lavapiés*, Barbieri establishes the Spanish setting.

Of the two main couples in *El barberillo de Lavapiés*, Paloma and Lamparilla are considered *majos*. The term “*majo*” or “*maja*” refers to a Spaniard of the lower class, a term especially used to describe those from Madrid from the late eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century. *Majos* are especially known for their eccentric form of dress that exaggerated traditional Spanish outfits from Andalusia.⁴⁹ Even though they are connected to Madrid, the draw from southern roots may be due to the shift of rural laborers to the capital city or from the assumption that Andalusia is the more authentic Spain.⁵⁰ It was often the belief that the people from the poor, small towns were truer to the Spanish ideals than those from the big cities. This idea presents itself in zarzuelas through the *majo* characters. The outfits and manners of the *majos* starkly contrast the French style of the upper class, and *majos* were known to pick fights with the *afrancesados*, the French supporters.⁵¹ Over time, the word “*majo*” has gained a positive connotation and has become a colloquialism for a good or nice person. Spaniards idealize *majos* as the embodiment of Spain’s values because they opposed French ideas and customs.

In the duet “Aquí estoy ya vestida”, Paloma and the Marquesita examine the contrasts between the *majos* and the upper class. This song is near the end of *El barberillo de Lavapiés* when the Marquesita prepares to leave for the countryside. Although the Marquesita and Paloma come from different social backgrounds, they rely on each other to survive. While earlier in the

⁴⁸ Yuri Porras, “Music, Text, and *Performing Cultural Identity* in Francisco Barbieri’s (1823-1894) *El Barberillo de Lavapiés* (1874),” in *Dissonances of Modernity: Music, Text, and Performance in Modern Spain*, ed. Irene Gómez-Castellano and Aurélie Vialette (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 171.

⁴⁹ “Majo,” *Art & Popular Culture*, Oct. 8, 2012, <http://www.artandpopularculture.com/Majo>.

⁵⁰ William Sayers, “Swagger and Sashay: An Etymology for Spanish ‘Majo/Maja,’” *Romance Notes* 44, no. 3, (2004): 296, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43802301>.

⁵¹ “Majo,” *Art & Popular Culture*, Oct. 8, 2012, <http://www.artandpopularculture.com/Majo>.

zarzuela, the Marquesita rescued Paloma's boyfriend, now she needs Paloma's help to disguise her as a *maja* and escape Madrid. Paloma must instruct the Marquesita in the ways of being a true *maja* in order to get away without detection.⁵² In the performance of the song, Paloma acts out certain motions such as dancing and waving her fan which the Marquesita imitates.⁵³ In addition to the physical acts, Paloma also teaches the Marquesita how to speak like a *maja* by using a dialect that someone of the lower class would have. For example, Paloma sings the phrase “*pa ser de Madrī*” instead of “*para ser de Madrid*” (‘in order to be from Madrid’).⁵⁴ It is common to not pronounce final consonants in the Andalusian dialect, so this less-formal pronunciation would automatically tell an audience member from Spain that Paloma is speaking with this dialect which is associated with the lower class and the *majos*. “*Aquí estoy ya vestida*” shows a further distinction between the *majos* and the elite because their clothing, actions, and way of speaking are all different. In this scene, there is clearly an us vs. them mentality that divides the upper and lower classes, but the Marquesita and Paloma bridge this gap in the hope of a better Spain.

El barberillo de Lavapiés showcases the anti-French mentality of the Spaniards both in the historical references to the Esquilache riots and in the *majos* who want to rid Spain of France's influence. The *majos* are the heroes of this production because they fearlessly fight for their chance to be heard in the government and evade the attempts by the Walloon guards to capture them. Barbieri's zarzuela rejected foreign influence just as his help in the revival of the zarzuela rejected the French and Italian opera tradition that came before it.

⁵² Christopher Webber, “El barberillo de Lavapiés,” last modified March 24, 1998, <https://www.zarzuela.net/syn/barberil.htm>.

⁵³ Francisco Asenjo Barbieri, *El barberillo de Lavapiés*, libretto by Luis Mariano de Larra, recorded 2020, Teatro Lírico Andaluz, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0y4xms4Uiw>.

⁵⁴ “Letra ‘Aquí estoy ya vestida como hace al caso’ (dúo), de la zarzuela ‘El barberillo de Lavapiés’,” Centro Nacional de Desarrollo Curricular en Sistemas no Propietarios, Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2023, <https://cedec.intef.es/rubrica/letra-aqui-estoy-ya-vestida-como-hace-al-caso-duo-de-la-zarzuela-el-barberillo-de-lavapiés/>.

La Construcción de La Gran Vía

La Gran Vía is a *género chico* and a *resista* written by Federico Chueca and Joaquín Valverde that premiered at the Teatro Felipe in Madrid on July 2, 1886.⁵⁵ *La Gran Vía* was so popular that it is one of the few *género chicos* that was performed outside of Spanish-speaking countries with great success in Paris, Vienna, London, and New York.⁵⁶ This one-hour spectacular begins with the personification of the streets of Madrid where each street is a caricature-like exaggeration of the place that it represents. The streets are bustling because of the news about a new street being built: la Gran Vía which today is a central street in Madrid with theaters, shops, and hotels. El Caballero de Gracia ('Graceful Gentleman'), a side street off of the Gran Vía, swaggers in singing a mock-waltz and joins El Paseante ('the walker') on a walk around the city of Madrid.⁵⁷ El Caballero and El Paseante come across many walks of life including housemaids, pickpockets, policemen, and marines who all have a story to tell in their songs. Other characters are more archetypal such as Prosperity, Pacifism, and Damage who get their names from city quarters in Madrid, but whose personalities contrast their names in every sense. Every interaction, or every sketch, highlights some characteristic of Spanish society and the stereotypes that surround the Spanish people. Political satire and exaggerated caricatures permeate the work in both the music and the dialogue. The construction of La Gran Vía is the overarching plot that holds the story together, but even this becomes a means for political satire. For example, in scene four, the midwife rushes in and announces the new birthdate for La Gran Vía: February 30th (a brilliant reference to the slow bureaucratic processes in Spain and the lazy Spaniard stereotype).⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Fernando Doménech Rico, *La zarzuela chica madrileña: La Gran Vía, La verbena de la Paloma, Agua, azucarillos y aguardiente, La Revoltosa* (Madrid: Clásicos Madrileños, 1998), 32.

⁵⁶ Christopher Webber, "La Gran Vía," last modified February 11, 2001, <https://www.zarzuela.net/syn/granvia.htm>.

⁵⁷ Webber, "La Gran Vía."

⁵⁸ Webber, "La Gran Vía."

One of the most recognizable songs from *La Gran Vía* is the Tango de la Menegilda, or “Pobre Chica” (‘Poor girl’). In this song, La Menegilda (‘the housemaid’) complains that she never wanted to be a housemaid and that those skills will not get her far in life. Her conscience tells her, “Learn to thief”, and going forward, she pockets some money from the shopping allowance and does as she pleases with the young Master of the house.⁵⁹ What a surprise it was when the lady of the house threw her out one Sunday evening! On the night of the premiere, “Pobre Chica” was repeated four times, and the theatergoers sang it out on the street as they left the theater. This reaction encouraged the composers to add a reprise of the song featuring Doña Virtudes (‘virtues’), La Menegilda’s employer.⁶⁰ The addition of Doña Virtudes creates a character foil that humorously dissects the relationship between the upper and lower classes. With the same music as La Menegilda’s tango, Doña Virtudes laments her troubles at the expense of her housemaids who do not do the chores, are rude to her, and steal her gowns and jewelry. She lists items that were stolen from her, but “at the end of these losses, / [she] lost her husband, that was the worst”.⁶¹ The only person she can trust to do the housework is herself.⁶²

Although Doña Virtudes is the one who is robbed, La Menegilda is also the victim of a society that does not support the poor and forces her to thief. Her character does not have a name other than “the housemaid” which reduces her character to a job, one which does not hold any status. The generic name also generalizes La Menegilda’s feelings about her social status to a whole group of people: the working class. The following translation gives the first few verses of “Pobre Chica”, where La Menegilda explains why she turned to thief.

⁵⁹ Christopher Webber, “La Gran Vía,” last modified Feb. 11, 2001, <https://www.zarzuela.net/syn/granvia.htm>.

⁶⁰ Fernando Doménech Rico, *La zarzuela chica madrileña: La Gran Vía, La verbena de la Paloma, Agua, azucarillos y aguardiente, La Revoltosa* (Madrid: Clásicos Madrileños, 1998), 35.

⁶¹ Christopher Webber, “La Gran Vía,” last modified Feb. 11, 2001, <https://www.zarzuela.net/syn/granvia.htm>.

⁶² Webber, “La Gran Vía.”

<p>¡Pobre chica, la que tiene que servir! Más valiera que se llegase a morir; porque si es que no sabe por las mañanas brujulear, aunque mil años viva, su paradero es el hospital. Cuando yo vine aquí lo primero que al pelo aprendí, fue a fregar, a barrer, a guisar, a planchar y a coser; pero viendo que estas cosas no me hacían prosperar, consulté con mi conciencia y al punto me dijo "Aprende a sisar." "Aprende a sisar, aprende a sisar."</p>	<p>Poor girl, having to be a servant. Better to have been dead. For if she doesn't know how to organize her mornings Although she might live for a thousand years, she'll end up in the workhouse. When I came here The first useful things I learned were to wash dishes, sweep, cook, iron and do the mending. But when I saw these things weren't going to get me far, I asked my conscience and it said to me straight away "Learn to thieve, learn to thieve, learn to thieve".⁶³</p>
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La Menegilda feels as if she cannot escape the cycle of the working class that she was born into, and she would be better off dead. The only way for her to earn enough money to live and become an individual beyond her status is to steal from her employers. Doña Virtudes's name implies virtue and higher moral principles which are attached to her higher social status. However, her status does not help her in the end since she is left without her riches, without her husband, and without a maid. Doña Virtudes is humbled to a mere maid herself just as La Menegilda finds her individuality and breaks out of the societal norms that had previously trapped her.

While the common people of Madrid like La Menegilda and Doña Virtudes are the subject of many scenes in *La Gran Vía*, the main character is the city of Madrid itself. Spanish cities, like other European cities at this time, were in the midst of industrialization and advancements in technology during the second half of the nineteenth century. The mass migrations from small towns to larger cities required cities to make adjustments to accommodate the new people, such as building a new street. However, these renovations came at a cost.

⁶³ Christopher Webber, "La Gran Vía," last modified Feb. 11, 2001, <https://www.zarzuela.net/syn/granvia.htm>.

Fernando Doménech Rico interprets *La Gran Vía* in terms of Madrid's dichotomies. He describes Madrid as a city where the biggest new projects contrast the general abandonment of streets and plazas, a city where the poor have to rely on all of their means to survive, a city obsessed with bullfighting and other amusements but is full of servants and thieves.⁶⁴ The construction of *La Gran Vía*, a project that seemed like it would never be completed, was prioritized above helping the poor working class. The effects of industrialization go beyond just the working-class people. The streets themselves worry about what the city will be like after *La Gran Vía* is built. Through these reactions, Chueca shows the Spaniards' attitude of resistance to modernization for fear of losing the principles that are the basis of Spanish society.

Through its political satire, *La Gran Vía* criticizes authority figures that make the decisions that affect the working-class people of Madrid. In the "Jota de las Ratas" ("Pickpocket's Jota"), three pickpockets escape from two incompetent police officers and mock their authority.⁶⁵ This scene is another example in *La Gran Vía* where the lower class triumphs over the rules which govern the society by becoming more than the poor neighborhood that they live in and more than their lower social status. All of these acts featuring the Spanish lower class highlight the diversity and the individuality of the Spanish common people, despite the ignorance of the Spanish government that puts their own wants above those of the people. The political commentary throughout *La Gran Vía* criticizes the people in power and sheds light on the problems of the Spanish people. Just as with other zarzuelas, through the stories of the everyday people set to music and dance, we see a deeper criticism of the pitfalls in Spanish society.

⁶⁴ Fernando Doménech Rico, *La zarzuela chica madrileña: La Gran Vía, La verbena de la Paloma, Agua, azucarillos y aguardiente, La Revoltosa* (Madrid: Clásicos Madrileños, 1998), 37.

⁶⁵ Christopher Webber, "La Gran Vía," last modified Feb. 11, 2001, <https://www.zarzuela.net/syn/granvia.htm>.

Conclusión

Both *El barberillo de Lavapiés* and *La Gran Vía* exemplify the realism of the working-class Spanish people that the zarzuela genre brings to life. Although Barbieri created a *zarzuela grande* based on real historical events and Chueca wrote a *género chico* with allegorical characters, both highlighted the role of the everyday people in Madrid. As the capital city of Spain, Madrid is a melting pot of everyone from the poorest beggars to the Spanish royalty. The politics of the day clearly influenced Barbieri and Chueca because of the political satire and repeated instances of mocking authority figures in their works. The comedy brings a light perspective to an otherwise tragic reality of poverty, exploitation, and submission to the values of the wealthy elite that people of the lower classes were subject to. Despite their social status, the characters in these zarzuelas are strong, resourceful, and happy. They are part of a community that dances in the street, sings traditional Spanish tunes, and has its own festivals. The *majos* and *majas* are not meant to be pitied; in fact, they are portrayed as triumphant at the end of these zarzuelas. Their stories prove their value in Spanish society as individuals that help define Spain's national identity.

In the last half of the nineteenth century, the Spanish people wanted to separate themselves from the foreign influences that had permeated Spain's politics, values, and music. As a means of executing this, composers revived the zarzuela tradition based on the baroque zarzuela but added stories about the Spanish working class. Since then, zarzuela has become a form of nationalism that creates pride among Spaniards for their resilience to hardships and for their traditional values in their culture. Zarzuela attempts to unify what is historically a divided nation into one true Spain. The genre defines the true Spanish identity through the history of Spain rather than the History of Spain. Defining Spain based on the kings and rulers that make

up the History presented in textbooks does not reflect the values and culture of all of the Spanish people. Instead, the history, or the stories from the small towns and the common people, create the true, united Spanish identity.

As with almost all art, zarzuelas capture a glimpse of the society that they come from, teaching the audience both the value of that society and its weaknesses. Spain's cultural identity has changed tremendously since the Golden Age of Zarzuela, and it is still developing every single day. The zarzuela tradition has grown into an entire class of music with a variety of subgenres by composers from all over the Spanish-speaking world. However, despite the vast number of works and their cultural significance to Spain and Latin America, zarzuelas are not widely studied by music scholars. I hope that by continuing to examine this art form in the context of a foreign culture, we can recognize the parallels to the complex class relations in our own society and can better understand how those relations help establish our own national identity. I believe it fitting that Spaniard's best way of describing the real world is through zarzuela, a light comedic musical theater genre, because if we cannot laugh a little bit about what is going on in our world today, then we don't deserve to study it.

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