

Reconstructing *Zarzuela* Performance Practices ca. 1900: Wax Cylinder and Gramophone Disc Recordings of *Gigantes y cabezudos*

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When the first commercial recordings were made in Madrid in late 1896, the *zarzuela* subgenre known as *género chico* (literally, “the little genre”) dominated the city’s musical-theatrical life. *Género chico* can be described as the confluence of the *zarzuela* genre and the *teatro por horas* (theater by the hour) format. Modern *zarzuela* (Spanish-language musical theater with spoken dialogue instead of recitative) developed from the 1840s in Madrid and at first adopted the three-act format known as *zarzuela grande*. Successful for two decades, *zarzuela grande* began to decline in the late 1860s, when in 1868 *café-teatros* and then theaters started to adopt *teatro por horas*, which featured short pieces of spoken theater sometimes interspersed with music. The new business format allowed theaters to program several pieces every evening in consecutive one-hour slots, lowering ticket prices and attracting new theatergoers from a variety of social backgrounds.¹ Eventually in 1880 *zarzuela* too embraced the *teatro por horas* format, which gave rise

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¹ On *teatro por horas* and *género chico*, see Nancy J. Membrez, “The *teatro por horas*: History, Dynamics and Comprehensive Bibliography of a Madrid Industry, 1867–1922 (*género chico*, *género ínfimo* and Early Cinema)” (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1987); Carmen del Moral Ruiz, *El género chico: Ocio y teatro en Madrid (1880–1910)* (Madrid: Alianza, 2004); and Clinton D. Young, *Music Theater and Popular Nationalism in Spain, 1880–1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016).

to a new, shorter *zarzuela* subgenre known as *género chico*. To facilitate rapid learning in a fast-paced industry where unsuccessful works were quickly replaced, *género chico* was often musically less ambitious than its predecessor, privileging lighter, contemporary subjects and relying heavily on standardized plot lines, characters, and music.

Unsurprisingly, *género chico* quickly found its way into contemporary Spanish recordings, often produced by local companies called *gabinetes fonográficos*, and it became, after opera and wind band music, one of the most recorded genres in Spain. The surviving recordings are thus key sources for the vocal performance practices of the genre at its prime, but they have not heretofore received attention from musicologists or performance practice scholars. A comprehensive answer to the question “How was *género chico* performed around 1900?” would be too ambitious for an article of this scope. Instead, I analyze the surviving recordings made between 1898 and 1905, both by Spanish *gabinetes* and by multinational companies visiting Spain, of Manuel Fernández Caballero’s *género chico* piece *Gigantes y cabezudos*² with an aim to identify parameters and methodologies for future research on the topic. I am particularly interested in exploring and demonstrating how an eminently indigenous genre such as *género chico* demands that we engage with its early recordings in a context-sensitive way. In this, most researchers of early recordings as documents of performance practice are in agreement and have repeatedly argued that we cannot regard a specific recording as a photographic impression of common performing practices on stage at a given moment in time, in a given context, or even for a given performer. Instead, a wealth of contextual information—the technologies used, the dynamics of the studio, and the broader aesthetic discourses surrounding recordings—needs to be taken into account when ascertaining what conclusions we can draw from a particular recording.³

² *Gigantes* (giants) and *cabezudos* (big-headed) are the names given to papier-mâché figures that are paraded around in local *fiestas* in Spain. They are typically dressed up after historical or local characters.

³ Robert Philip, *Early Recordings and Musical Style: Changing Tastes in Instrumental Performance, 1900–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Michael Chanan, *Repeated Takes: A Short History of Recording and Its Effects on Music* (New York: Verso, 1995); Patrick Feaster, “Framing the Mechanical Voice: Generic Conventions of Early Phonograph Recording,” *Folklore Forum* 32 (2001): 57–102; Robert Philip, *Performing Music in the Age of Recording* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, “Portamento and Musical Meaning,” *Journal of Musicological Research* 25 (2006): 233–61; Nicholas Cook, “Performance Analysis and Chopin’s Mazurkas,” *Musicae Scientiae* 11 (2007): 183–207; Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, “Sound and Meaning in Recordings of Schubert’s ‘Die junge Nonne,’” *Musicae Scientiae* 11 (2007): 209–36; Patrick Feaster, “The Following Record’: Making Sense of Phonographic Performance, 1877–1908” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2007); Rebecca Mara Plack, “The Substance of Style: How Singing Creates Sound in Lieder Recordings, 1902–1939” (PhD diss., Cornell University, 2008); Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical*

I take this context-sensitive approach a step further: most researchers have focused on the classical canon and, as such, have tended to share certain assumptions that are not immediately applicable to *género chico*. For example, while singers in both opera⁴ and *género chico* used portamento, vibrato, and tempo changes for expressive ends, it cannot be automatically assumed that these devices were used in the same way in both, as I will discuss in this article. *Género chico* also differed significantly from both opera and symphonic and chamber art music in how each of these genres engaged their audiences: indeed, *género chico* always remained eminently local and place-specific, and did not have the aspirations of universality that the other genres tended to have. These differences had some impact, respectively, on how *género chico* was recorded and how recordings were marketed. Another key difference is that researchers normally focus on recordings made and marketed internationally by multinational companies, while recordings of *género chico* were, at this stage, highly localized.

In what follows, I examine two key contexts that allow us to ascertain what existing early recordings can tell us about vocal performance practices of *género chico* around 1900: firstly, *género chico* culture on stage; and secondly, the indigenous recording industry led by the *gabinetes*. I then analyze the surviving recordings of *Gigantes y cabezudos* in light of these contexts and discuss how conclusions drawn from these analyses might guide future research into *género chico*.

Género chico: *Acting with the Voice*

The heyday of *género chico* extended from 1880 to the early 1900s, and most of the authors of the first histories of the genre (published between the 1920s and 1950s) could still boast firsthand experience of it.⁵ They

Performances (London: CHARM, 2009); Nicholas Cook, "The Ghost in the Machine: Towards a Musicology of Recordings," *Musicae Scientiae* 14 (2010): 3–21; Nicholas Cook, *Beyond the Score: Music as Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Massimo Zicari, "Ah! non credea mirarti' nelle fonti discografiche di primo Novecento: Adelina Patti e Luisa Tetrazzini," *Schweizer Jahrbuch für Musikwissenschaft* 34/35 (2014/2015): 193–222; and Massimo Zicari, "Expressive Tempo Modifications in Adelina Patti's Recordings: An Integrated Approach," *Empirical Musicology Review* 12 (2017): 42–56.

⁴ I am referring here to Italian and French opera, which were the most widely performed in Spain at this point.

⁵ These include Marciano Zurita, *Historia del género chico* (Madrid: Prensa Popular, 1920); Emilio Cotarelo y Mori, *Historia de la zarzuela o sea el drama lírico en España, desde su origen a fines del siglo XIX* (Madrid: Archivos, 1934); José Subirá, *Historia de la música teatral en España* (Barcelona: Labor, 1945); Matilde Muñoz, *Historia de la zarzuela y el género chico* (Madrid: Tesoro, 1946); and José Deleito y Piñuela, *Origen y apogeo del "género chico"* (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1949). A further study focuses exclusively on the Teatro Apolo, commonly known as "the cathedral of *género chico*": Víctor Ruiz Albéniz "Chispero," *Teatro*

were therefore acutely aware that the history of *género chico* could not be told as a “composers-and-works” narrative: they all paid attention to performance, often structuring their narratives around the premieres of significant works of the genre and discussing audience responses; and they also granted attention to performers—from naming them alongside some of the main titles they premiered to offering more detailed commentary that allows us to understand, to an extent, what audiences regarded as desirable in a performance.

One surprising conclusion revealed by these histories is that audiences did not necessarily expect the performers to sing well. There are numerous examples of successful performers whose vocal abilities were limited or nonexistent; chroniclers of the genre even repeatedly claimed that the foundational *género chico* play, Federico Chueca’s *La canción de la Lola* (Lola’s song, 1888), was written in such a way that the two female protagonists did not have to sing at all.⁶ Other performers did sing; some had mediocre or downright unpleasant voices,⁷ and a few had solid, trained singing voices that allowed them to venture occasionally into the more demanding *zarzuela grande* roles. Whereas *zarzuela grande* performers needed to have a trained voice and the ability to sing and recite Spanish-language text clearly and expressively,⁸ *género chico* could accommodate a range of skills or “performing languages” (singing, dancing, reciting, and moving on stage), with different performers excelling at different languages.⁹ Emilio Casares divides *género chico* performers into “acting singers” and “singing actors,”¹⁰ although in practice these would have functioned as the extremes on a spectrum rather than as absolute categories. Moreover, when we read critics or historians describing particular performers as good singers, we should be aware that this could mean different things: that they were indeed capable of tackling some of the most demanding roles (from a purely vocal point of view),¹¹ or that they possessed neither a well-trained nor beautiful voice but

Apolo: Historial, anecdotario y estampas madrileñas de su tiempo (1873–1929) (Madrid: Prensa Castellana, 1953). An earlier work that touches upon the origins of *género chico* is Antonio Peña y Goñi, *La ópera española y la música dramática en España en el siglo XIX: Apuntes históricos* (Madrid: Imprenta de El Liberal, 1881).

⁶ Muñoz, *Historia de la zarzuela*, 245; and Cotarelo y Mori, *Historia de la zarzuela*, 860.

⁷ One such example was Julio Ruiz, on whom see Deleito y Piñuela, *Origen y apogeo del “género chico,”* 68.

⁸ Emilio Casares, “Voz,” in *Diccionario de la zarzuela: España e Hispanoamérica*, ed. Emilio Casares (Madrid: Instituto Complutense de Ciencias Musicales, 2006), 2:941–44. Casares uses singing teacher and treatise author Antonio Cordero (1823–82) as his main source.

⁹ Margot Versteeg, *De fusiladores y morcilleros: El discurso cómico del género chico (1870–1910)* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 24.

¹⁰ Emilio Casares, *Historia gráfica de la zarzuela: Del canto y los cantantes* (Madrid: ICCMU/Fundación de la zarzuela española, 2000), 147.

¹¹ Ramón Regidor Arribas, *La voz en la zarzuela* (Madrid: Real Musical, 1991), 12.

strong musicianship skills and the ability to deliver the text clearly and expressively.¹²

The broader social and cultural context of *género chico* also offers insights into singing practices. By 1900 the genre had turned into a mass-production industry. Individual plays relied on the audience's familiarity with certain types, plots, and tropes, and intertextual references among *género chico* plays abounded in the form of sequels, prequels, contrafacta, and parodies. Beyond the theater, *género chico* was alive in the streets, with organ grinders and street singers performing numbers from recent successful plays.¹³ The nascent Spanish recording industry can be regarded, on the one hand, as an extension of these practices in that it again allowed audiences, already familiar with and embedded within this theatrical culture, to listen to isolated numbers in their own homes, dissociated from the context that theaters provided. On the other hand, our own experience of listening to the same recording is very different now that the lively *género chico* theatrical culture has long faded from living memory.

Useful here are some of the concepts that previous research has developed to bridge the perceptual gap between acoustic reality and recorded sound. Stefan Gauß observes that the earliest recordings replaced "the captured acoustic reality with something new, with its own specific qualities."¹⁴ Audiences needed to develop, in Arved Ashby's words, the "phonographic literacy" necessary to recognize recorded sound as a representation of acoustic reality,¹⁵ and recorded sound itself started to be assessed in terms of its "performative fidelity," that is, the extent to which a recording was "accepted as *doing* whatever the original would have done in the same context."¹⁶ Both Ashby and Patrick Feaster draw attention to the socially constructed, context-dependent mechanisms by which audiences came to accept recorded sound as truthful. Similar mechanisms are at work in *género chico* recordings. When analyzing these recordings, we should thus bear in mind that their target audiences would have been immersed in this lively theatergoing culture. We should also consider whether these recordings captured literally stage practices that might not have always worked optimally in recorded form; or, on the contrary, whether recordists and singers consciously

¹² Regidor Arribas, *La voz en la zarzuela*, 23.

¹³ Deleito y Piñuela, *Origen y apogeo del "género chico"*, 14.

¹⁴ Stefan Gauß, "Listening to the Horn: On the Cultural History of the Phonograph and the Gramophone," in *Sounds of Modern History: Auditory Cultures in 19th- and 20th-Century Europe*, ed. Daniel Morat (Oxford: Berghahn, 2014), 71–100, at 81.

¹⁵ Arved Ashby, *Absolute Music, Mechanical Reproduction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 30.

¹⁶ Patrick Feaster, "'Rise and Obey the Command': Performative Fidelity and the Exercise of Phonographic Power," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 24 (2012): 357–95, at 358.

modified performance practices to compensate for the loss of certain aspects of a live performance, seeking to achieve performative rather than acoustic fidelity.

The gabinetes fonográficos, Gramophone, and Noncommercial Recordings

The early history of commercial recording in Spain provides further context for analyzing early recordings. Since Spain never produced its own phonographs on a commercial scale, it was Edison's successive Spring Motor Edison, Edison Home, and Standard Edison phonographs, launched between 1896 and 1898, that allowed domestic phonography to develop. Until the consolidation of multinational companies in Spanish territory in 1903–5, the market was dominated by the so-called *gabinetes fonográficos*. "Gabinete," literally "cabinet," was also used to designate a room in men's middle- and upper-class social clubs (*casinos*) where members could socialize and read newspapers and magazines—hence, the name *gabinete fonográfico* would have imparted an aura of exclusivity and privacy. Primary sources (advertisements, catalogues, surviving cylinders, and press reviews) suggest that around forty *gabinetes* were active, with more than thirty of them in Madrid, Barcelona, and Valencia. Most *gabinetes*, though, were not operative for the full period between 1896 and 1905 but rather for one or two years only; it appears to have been a promising business with relatively low barriers to entry but also an unstable one with little to no guarantee of success. Many *gabinetes* indeed operated part-time as departments of existing establishments in scientific or technical fields.

Gabinetes sold phonographs and wax cylinders—the former were always imported from the United States or France, whereas the latter were commonly produced by the *gabinetes* themselves, who employed local singers or singers on tour. Most *gabinetes* sold only their own cylinders, but a few establishments in the provinces sold cylinders made by *gabinetes* in Madrid. More than a thousand of these recordings have survived; about half of them are held at Eresbil-Archivo Vasco de la Música, more than three hundred are at the Biblioteca Nacional de España in Madrid, and the rest are in other public or private collections. About two-thirds of them feature instrumental music, 259 are opera recordings, and the total number of *género chico* recordings amounts to 175 (in comparison, sixty-eight *zarzuela grande* recordings survive). A further important corpus of wax cylinder recordings comes from the Ruperto Regordosa collection (now preserved at the Biblioteca de Catalunya). Regordosa, a textile industrialist and amateur recordist, recorded for his own private use well-known singers and instrumentalists at his

home in Barcelona starting in 1898; his collection totals almost four hundred cylinders, including twenty-nine recordings of *género chico*. Finally, engineers from the Compagnie Française du Gramophone visited Spain for the first time in 1899 to record local artists (some of whom also recorded for the *gabinetes*) and came back regularly until the company opened a branch in Barcelona in 1903. Most recordings were of indigenous genres (*zarzuela*, flamenco, and some band music), which allowed Gramophone to cater to the local market while offering a few “exotic” selections to its customers elsewhere.¹⁷

Three aspects of the recording industry in *fin-de-siècle* Spain are particularly relevant to my discussion of performance practices. We must first consider the technological capabilities and limitations of the available sound technologies. Since other authors have provided illustrative summaries, I will not provide extended coverage here but will refer to some of these limitations as necessary when discussing specific recordings in the last section of this article.¹⁸ There is one technical aspect, however, that merits attention, as it was unique to the *gabinetes* industry. *Gabinetes*, like their counterparts elsewhere, recorded on brown wax cylinders, which could not be easily duplicated. Worldwide, this presented one of the main obstacles to the growth of the developing recording industry, and individuals and companies repeatedly attempted to overcome this limitation. Solutions included having performers record for two or more phonographs at the same time or making copies from a single “master” cylinder with the help of a machine called a pantograph. But these strategies were not entirely satisfactory: the size of recording studios at the time meant that no more than four or five phonographs could be used simultaneously, while pantographic dubbing could only produce twenty-five to one hundred copies before the master cylinder became too worn out, with the resulting cylinders being of inferior quality.¹⁹

Spanish *gabinetes* dealt with cylinder duplication in peculiar ways. Evidence suggests that some *gabinetes* did use pantographic duplication (e.g., Viuda de Aramburo and Hugens y Acosta);²⁰ however, some of the strongest voices in the recording scene—including *gabinete* owner Álvaro

¹⁷ Details from recording sessions, as well as the musicians recorded in each session, can be gathered from Alan Kelly, *The Gramophone Company Limited, The Spanish Catalogue: Including Portuguese Recordings* ([n.p.]: self-published, 2006).

¹⁸ Most notably Leech-Wilkinson, *Changing Sound of Music*, chap. 2, paras. 21–28; and Neal Peres da Costa, *Off the Record: Performing Practices in Romantic Piano Playing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4–40.

¹⁹ David L. Morton Jr., *Sound Recording: The Life Story of a Technology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 27.

²⁰ Marqués de Alta-Villa, “Fonografía: Cuestión palpitante,” *El cardo*, April 8, 1901, 14–15; Álvaro Ureña, “Los artistas y el fonógrafo,” *La época*, February 15, 1900, 2; and Álvaro Ureña, “Comunicado,” *La correspondencia militar*, February 16, 1900, 2.

Ureña and the Marquis of Alta-Villa, editor of the specialized journal *Boletín fonográfico (El cardo)*—repeatedly and vocally opposed duplication. They cited concerns with quality,²¹ but they also argued that the main strength of the *gabinetes* lay in their commitment to producing cylinders in a quasi-artisanal way for a select group of customers rather than for the masses.²² Most of the surviving Spanish cylinders are thus unique, or quasi-unique—one of a handful of performances of the same piece recorded that day in the studio. It follows from this that the surviving cylinders constitute but a minuscule fraction of the total produced by the *gabinetes*; hence, generalizations must be always made with caution.²³ The above does not apply to Gramophone discs, which could be easily duplicated; this was ultimately one of the reasons why Gramophone superseded the *gabinetes*.

A second relevant point concerns the connections between the recording industry and the *género chico* scene. The *género chico* community seems to have taken little notice of the *gabinetes*: none of the above-mentioned histories of the genre mentions recording technologies or engages significantly with discography in any format; neither did the numerous publications around 1900 (such as *Juan Rana* and *El arte del teatro*) that reviewed *género chico* performances and published gossip about impresarios, composers, and singers. Nevertheless, recordings would have appealed to at least some of the most affluent theatergoers, and there are indications that the *gabinetes* tried to capitalize on this. Most of the Madrid *gabinetes*, for example, were located literally next door or within less than two hundred yards of one or more *género chico* theaters.²⁴ The selection of titles that they recorded also suggests that

²¹ Marqués de Alta-Villa, “Fonografía: Cuestión palpitante.”

²² Cilindrique [Marqués de Alta-Villa], “Para todos, sabios é ignorantes,” *El cardo*, December 15, 1900, 14.

²³ No accounts or books from the *gabinetes* have survived, so quantitative data about their output are extremely scarce and unreliable. Hugens y Acosta claimed in January 1901 that they had sold thirty thousand cylinders in the previous two years (“En formación,” *El cardo*, January 22, 1901, 14). If we accept this claim as truthful and assume that Hugens y Acosta’s output remained stable during its eight years of operation (an assumption that is, of course, not without its problems), this would yield a result of one hundred and twenty thousand overall for Hugens y Acosta alone, of which 163 have survived—a ratio of one surviving cylinder per 736 produced. Tenor Jesús Valiente claimed to have recorded seven thousand cylinders for Valencia *gabinete* Puerto y Novella (“Jesús Valiente,” *Boletín fonográfico* 12 [1900]: 189). Valiente only ever recorded for Puerto y Novella, which was active for only one additional year; if we assume that Valiente recorded as much in his second year as he did in his first, he would have recorded a total of fourteen thousand cylinders, of which eighteen have survived—so one surviving cylinder per 778, a rate not dissimilar to Hugens y Acosta’s.

²⁴ No fewer than three *gabinetes* stood in the Calle del Príncipe a few yards from the Teatro de la Comedia, with two more within a hundred yards. There was one *gabinete* within the same block as the Teatro de la Zarzuela, and another one within a hundred yards. Hugens y Acosta was located by the exit door of the well-attended Teatro Apolo. With the

gabinetes wished to follow the latest developments in the industry and responded quickly to changing fancies; indeed, about half of the surviving *género chico* recordings are of numbers from strictly contemporary works that premiered between 1896 and 1905, although the lack of dates in the cylinders does not allow us to establish how soon after a premiere the recordings would have been made.

The third point concerns how *gabinetes* and Gramophone selected singers for *género chico* recordings. These tended to be lesser-known singers, which is consonant with practices elsewhere. Celebrity recordings did not become widespread until 1903–4, with Victor's famed operatic series; before this, the phonograph often allowed relatively unknown artists to build a career around recording.²⁵ Although no contemporary firsthand testimonies from Spanish singers have survived, we can presume that around 1900 many singers would have seen the new industry as unstable and unpredictable. Similarly, the conditions in which these recordings were made would not have been particularly appealing to those who already had prestige and a solid income from their stage engagements. Recording sessions could be long, and singers needed to contort themselves so that their voice could be captured at its best by the phonograph—for example, leaning forward to project their voices into the horn. Among *género chico*'s best-known *primeras tiples* (i.e., female performers taking main roles), only about half recorded, and even for those who did record (e.g., Lucrecia Arana, Matilde Pretel, Leocadia Alba, and Concha Segura), surviving cylinders are very scarce or nonexistent, which suggests that they did not record as extensively as some of their lesser-known counterparts.

The dual contexts of *género chico* theatrical culture and early Spanish recording history raise three specific points that need to be addressed before I analyze the recordings. The first of these concerns the experimental nature of recording technologies at the time. This was certainly the case worldwide but perhaps more so for the *gabinetes*, which worked independently of Edison and often in a rather precarious yet fast-paced milieu. Many *gabinete* owners developed their own technological innovations or published their findings regarding the recording process in the specialized press.²⁶ At the same time, since certain singers' names appear frequently in catalogues and recordings, it is likely that these performers would have developed studio-specific skills, such as being able to control

center of Madrid being rather compact at that time, only the Teatro Novedades did not have a *gabinete* within a hundred yards of its premises.

²⁵ Roland Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph, 1877–1977* (London: Macmillan, 1977), 54.

²⁶ These include *Boletín fonográfico (El cardo)*, published in Madrid, and *Boletín fonográfico*, published in Valencia. Despite sharing a name, the publications operated independently of each other. They were both published for a period of less than two years between 1900 and 1901, with the former being published weekly and the latter twice a month.

their nerves in a recording session or learning how to adjust their position to maximize the quality of the acoustic signal.²⁷ *Gabinete* cylinders were not dated, which makes it impossible to establish with any certainty how recording processes and the quality of recordings might have evolved in the period from 1896 to 1906; nevertheless, our analysis of individual recordings should be informed by an awareness of the experimental nature of the business.

Secondly, we must bear in mind that experimentation was not exclusively technological but extended into the realm of the aesthetic and ontological. *Gabinetes* and their customers needed to grapple with the question of how to reflect (or hear) the live performance of *género chico* in their recordings. Most recordings were unique (or quasi-unique), and the *gabinetes* took steps to market them to *género chico* aficionados, which together raise questions regarding what these recordings were supposed to do: it is likely that, at least in some contexts, they might have been intended as mementos of a particular performance or of the theatergoing experience more generally. Therefore, in analyzing individual recordings we must ask ourselves whether recordists might have been trying to capture some of the contextual cues naively (with singers simply doing what they would have done on the stage) or whether at some point they consciously tried to simulate them through other means or to compensate for their absence.

Thirdly, written sources suggest that different approaches to singing coexisted within *género chico*. Although expressive text delivery was key in all cases, we must be open to the possibility that different singers followed different strategies in this respect: some might have used portamento with expressive aims, whereas others might have opted for a *quasi parlato* delivery with little vibrato, which allowed them to be fully intelligible. The same performer might also have made different decisions on different occasions—depending on the piece they were performing, the circumstances of the performance, and whether they were performing live or in the recording studio. Comparing and contrasting the singing practices and styles we hear in a particular recording with written sources concerning its performer may help us ascertain the extent to which the recording might be representative; it may also help us reach broader conclusions about how *género chico* critics and audiences conceptualized specific performances within the landscape of possibilities available to performers of the genre.

²⁷ Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 45; and Simon Trezise, “The Recorded Document: Interpretation and Discography,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook, Eric Clarke, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, and John Rink (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 186–209.

Analysis of Gigantes y cabezudos Recordings

The most successful *género chico* work that premiered during the era of the *gabinetes*, Fernández Caballero's *Gigantes y cabezudos* provides a significant case study for analyzing how *género chico* recordings might have been situated with respect to the genre's existence and evolution. Another reason that makes *Gigantes y cabezudos* an attractive case study is that it is the *género chico* work with the most surviving wax cylinder recordings (seventeen), as well as two Gramophone discs predating 1905 (see table 1). The fact that instrumental versions of some of its numbers have survived to the present is further testimony to the work's enormous success in its day.

The reasons for the play's success upon its premiere in November 1898 must be sought in its commentary on the Spanish-American War in Cuba. The war was fought at a considerable cost to Spain's less privileged classes (the *pueblo*), and it is these that *Gigantes y cabezudos* celebrates, praising their courage, patriotism, and resilience at the front and back home via the exemplar of the heroine, Pilar, a young woman from Saragossa who longs to be reunited with her boyfriend, Jesús, a soldier in Cuba.²⁸

My analysis of the recordings focuses principally on those numbers for which there is more than one good-quality vocal recording: that is, the numbers labeled in table 1 (following the vocal score) as 2, 4, and 5c. I will touch upon parameters that are by now well established in the study of early recordings as documents of performance practice, particularly in vocal music. The weight I give to each of these in my discussion, however, is dependent on the particularities of *género chico*, a genre akin to opera in some respects but rather different in others. I draw on existing studies in other genres when considering portamento,²⁹ which was as consistently used in *género chico* as it was in opera and instrumental music, and existing research on the expressive use of large- and small-scale tempo modifications in both vocal and instrumental music.³⁰

Nevertheless, there are other respects in which *género chico* requires a different focus. Vibrato is one such category. A great deal of research on singing practices in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (as

²⁸ Enrique Encabo, *Música y nacionalismos en España: El arte en la era de la ideología* (Barcelona: Erasmus, 2007), 73–79; Young, *Music Theater and Popular Nationalism in Spain*, 8–10; and Membrez, “The *teatro por horas*,” 69, 115–18.

²⁹ Sarah Potter, “Changing Vocal Style and Technique in Britain during the Long Nineteenth Century” (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2014), 103–13; Leech-Wilkinson, *Changing Sound of Music*, chap. 4, paras. 10–15 and chap. 7, paras. 5–6; and Plack, “Substance of Style,” 15–19, 44, 70.

³⁰ Zicari, “Ah! non credea mirarti”; Zicari, “Expressive Tempo Modifications”; and Peres da Costa, *Off the Record*, 195–249.

TABLE 1.
Surviving recordings of *Gigantes y cabezudos* on wax cylinder support and in early discs, 1898–1905.

| Number | Performer(s) | Label | Date ^a | Collection ^b | |
|--|--|--------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|------------|
| | | | | Signature | Digitized? |
| No. 2, romanza: "Esta es su carta" | Adela Taberner | Manuel Moreno Cases (Barcelona) | 1900 | BNE CL./51 | Yes |
| No. 2, romanza: "Esta es su carta" | Marina Gurina | Regordosa (noncommercial) | 1898–? ^c | BC CIL./215 | Yes |
| No. 3, jota: "Si las mujeres mandasen" | Señorita Martínez | V. Corrons (Barcelona) | 1898–99 | BNE CL./266 | Yes |
| No. 3, jota: "Si las mujeres mandasen" | Lucrecia Arana | Hugens y Acosta (Madrid) | 1898–1905 | Eresbil FA60/048 | Yes |
| No. 4, chorus: "Por fin te miro, Ebro famoso" | Singers from Teatro Apolo | La fonográfica madrileña (Madrid) | 1902–5 | BNE CL./38 | Yes |
| No. 4, chorus: "Por fin te miro, Ebro famoso" | Choir from Teatro de la Zarzuela | Hugens y Acosta (Madrid) | 1898–1905 | BNE CL./359 | Yes |
| No. 4, chorus: "Por fin te miro, Ebro famoso" | unknown choir, soloist Rafael López | Gramophone | 1902 | BNE DS/11155/6 | Yes |
| No. 4, chorus: "Por fin te miro, Ebro famoso" | unknown | unknown | unknown | Eresbil uncatalogued | No |
| No. 4, chorus: "Por fin te miro, Ebro famoso" (instrumental version) | Banda del Regimiento de Vizcaya | unknown | unknown | Eresbil uncatalogued | No |
| No. 5, chorus and jota: "Los de Calatorao" | Choir from Teatro de la Zarzuela | Viuda de Aramburo (Madrid) | 1898–1900 | BNE CL./391 | Yes |
| No. 5, chorus and jota: "Los de Calatorao" | unknown | unknown | unknown | Eresbil uncatalogued | No |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|----------------------------|-----------|-------------------------|-----|
| No. 5c, jota: "Luchando tercros y rudos" | Ascensión Miralles | Álvaro Ureña (Madrid) | 1899–1903 | BNE CL/13 | Yes |
| No. 5c, jota: "Luchando tercros y rudos" | Blanca del Carmen | Viuda de Aramburo (Madrid) | 1898–1900 | BNE CL/313 | Yes |
| No. 5c, jota: "Luchando tercros y rudos" | Blanca del Carmen | Gramophone | 1902 | BNE DS/14055/10 | Yes |
| No. 5c, jota: "Luchando tercros y rudos" | Señor Navarro | Viuda de Aramburo (Madrid) | 1898–1900 | Eresbil FA60/184 | Yes |
| No. 5c, jota: "Luchando tercros y rudos" (instrumental version) | Banda del Regimiento de Vizcaya | unknown | unknown | Eresbil uncatalogued | No |
| No. 6, "Salve" | unknown (choir and two female soloists) | V. Corrons (Barcelona) | 1898–99 | BNE CL/257 | Yes |
| Unknown chorus | unknown | unknown | unknown | Eresbil uncatalogued | No |
| Unknown instrumental excerpt | Banda del Regimiento de Garelano | unknown | unknown | Eresbil uncatalogued | No |

³⁸The only recordings for which dates can be conclusively established (following Kelly, *The Gramophone Company Limited*) are the Gramophone ones. The *gabinetes* did not include dates either in the cylinders themselves or in catalogues, and so dates for *gabinete* recordings are tentatively suggested by using either 1898 or the date when the *gabinete* started trading (whichever is the latest) as the *terminus post quem*, and the year where the *gabinete* was last active as the *terminus ante quem*.

³⁹Recordings held at the Biblioteca Nacional de España (BNE) can be accessed by searching for the signature number at <http://bibliotecadigitalhispanica.bne.es>. Those held at Eresbil-Archivo de la Música Vasca are only accessible on site. The recording held at the Biblioteca de Catalunya (BC) is accessible at <http://mdc.csuc.cat/cdm/singleitem/collection/sonorbc/id/75/rec/3>.

⁴⁰The Biblioteca de Catalunya gives 1898–1918 as the date for all Regordosa cylinders—1898 is the launch date of the phonograph Regordosa employed, and 1918 is the date of his death. However, a study of the dates in which the singers he recorded were visiting or otherwise active in Barcelona suggests that the bulk of the recordings were made between 1898 and 1908. It is not known when Gurina recorded for Regordosa or how many times, but she did record the concert song *La rigoianica*, composed in 1906, so her recording of "Esta es su carta" might date from as late as that or even afterwards, which would make it the latest in this corpus.

well as on bowed strings) has focused on vibrato,³¹ and while *género chico* early recordings could indeed be analyzed on the basis of whether vibrato is present or not and what types of vibrato can be heard, this seems, on the basis of the existing recordings and other evidence presented above, a somewhat narrow perspective. Instead, I propose to consider the presence or absence of vibrato in connection with the broader issue of text intelligibility and expressiveness. While vibrato could certainly be used for expressive aims, consistent use could have also compromised intelligibility, a key concern in *género chico*. Not all *género chico* singers were skilled enough to produce a consistent, reliable vibrato, but those who were must have been faced with the decision of whether to suppress vibrato in favor of intelligibility or to compensate for its presence (and the concomitant loss of intelligibility) with other expressive devices. In practice, it is likely that singers made the decision depending on the context.

The analysis of these recordings is not intended to settle matters concerning these parameters in the performance of *género chico* around 1900. Instead, it is a starting point and a considered case study of how specific early recordings of the genre can be listened to, analyzed, and contextualized.

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“*Esta es su carta*”

“*Esta es su carta*” (Here is his letter) is the first solo number of the *zarzuela*. Compared to Pilar’s other solo numbers, based on *jota* rhythmic patterns,³² it is the most vocally demanding, requiring good legato abilities, solid low and middle registers, and a range that stretches up to G₅. According to contemporary reviews by José Deleito y Piñuela, these were indeed the main strengths of Lucrecia Arana—the well-known *primera tiple* who created the role of Pilar.³³ What little can still be heard in Arana’s Hugens y Acosta recording of “*Si las mujeres mandasen*” (If women were in charge), as well as in her later recordings, which are beyond the scope of this article, suggests that Deleito y Piñuela’s judgment was accurate.

Two other surviving recordings (Marina Gurina’s for Regordosa and Adela Taberner’s for Manuel Moreno Cases) are, fortunately, more

³¹ Potter, “Changing Vocal Style and Technique,” 67–89; Plack, “Substance of Style,” 12, 19; and Philip, *Early Recordings and Musical Style*, 99.

³² The *jota* is a triple-meter dance; even though versions of the *jota* exist throughout most Spanish regions, the dance is most commonly associated with the region of Aragón (where the action of *Gigantes y cabezudos* is set).

³³ Reviewing Arana in a similar role (Carlos in *La viejecita*), José Deleito y Piñuela wrote that “in the low notes she reached exhilarating intensity, vigour and purity of metal [en las notas graves alcanzaba intensidad, vigor y pureza de metal, arrebatadores].” Deleito y Piñuela, *Origen y apogeo del “género chico,”* 404–5.

suitable for analysis. It may be surprising how different Gurina's and Taberner's voices sound—and how different they sound in comparison to Arana's voice in later recordings. It is not simply a matter of voice type or technique but rather of very different approaches to *género chico* performance and how the different skills required of a performer should be balanced. Gurina's recording, as digitized by the Biblioteca de Catalunya, sounds a minor third lower than written. We should not necessarily assume that this is the originally recorded pitch: one of the challenges of digitizing cylinders is that there is no straightforward way to determine the speed at which a recording should be played, and playing a cylinder too slow results in the digitization being lower in pitch than the original.³⁴ Nevertheless, there are indications that the digitization speed for this cylinder must be generally accurate: an abnormally slow rate would have also altered Regordosa's voice in the spoken announcement he makes at the beginning of the recording, yet his voice here does not differ substantially from other spoken announcements in his collection. Similarly, the tempo of the recording ($\text{♩} = 130$) is not abnormally slow but rather on the fast side. Moreover, the practice of transposing solos to suit the soloist's range, which was commonplace in opera, happened in *zarzuela* too; in this case the recording suggests that Gurina carefully chose the key in which she sang so as to play to the strengths of her voice. Her voice is most expressive in her low register, and she veers into *quasi parlato* in short passages of expressive intensity (see ex. 1). It is clear from the recording, however, that Gurina was not a "singing actress" but rather a *bona fide* singer with acceptably solid middle and higher registers. Her recording for Regordosa matches what we can read in contemporary reviews: she was not necessarily an established *primera tiple* but was much in demand from companies touring the provinces, and she had a reputation for having a powerful, flexible voice that allowed her to tackle *zarzuela grande* roles in addition to *género chico*.³⁵

While there is no evidence that Gurina ever sang the role of Pilar on stage, Adela Taberner did in a tour of the provinces in 1900; one critic described her as "a very acceptable Pilar."³⁶ Although the success of *Gigantes y cabezudos* in late 1898 in Madrid encouraged numerous companies elsewhere in Spain to put on their own productions, not all companies would have cast a singer of vocal qualities comparable to

³⁴ Leech-Wilkinson, *Changing Sound of Music*, chap. 3, paras. 22–23; and Adrian Poole, "Determining Playback Speeds of Early Ethnographic Wax Cylinder Recordings: Technical and Methodological Issues," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 24 (2015): 73–101, at 74–75.

³⁵ "Teatro de Parish," *La época*, October 15, 1898, 2; "Teatro Circo de Parish," *El liberal*, October 15, 1898, 3; "Parish," *La izquierda dinástica*, October 15, 1898, 1; "Parish," *El Globo*, November 9, 1900, 2; and "Teatro Eslava," *El Guadalete*, July 4, 1902, 3.

³⁶ "Noticias teatrales," *La Rioja*, January 14, 1900, 2.

EXAMPLE 1. “Esta es su carta” (mm. 98–103), as heard in Gurina’s recording (a minor third lower than written). Translation: “He walks through tropical forests and puddles with no bread or shoes.”



Arana’s, as demonstrated by reviews of Taberner and from her surviving recording. Indeed, reviewers did not normally single out Taberner’s voice; instead, they highlighted—in a rather vague, unspecific way—her expressivity or artistry, which suggests that her singing was not very good.³⁷ The most direct appraisal of her singing is a note in *La correspondencia de España*, which points in that same direction: the reviewer claims that “neither her singing nor her reciting skills will ever make her a *primera tiple*.”³⁸

When listening to Taberner’s recording, it is tempting to agree with her critics. We must bear in mind, however, that this is the only recording of her that has survived; thus it is impossible to ascertain the extent to which what we hear was influenced by environmental factors (poor recording practices, nervousness, or the fragility of the cylinder itself). We do know that the technological limitations of the time were not particularly friendly to bright, high voices like Taberner’s, which are made to sound shrill.³⁹ The problem here, however, is not so much shrillness but a lack of vibrato and an inconsistent, breathy tone; Taberner’s diction is clear, and she shows some good musicianship in her use of portamento, but it is easy to understand from this recording how, from a purely vocal perspective, her performance of this romanza would have paled next to Arana’s or even Gurina’s. It is equally easy, though, to appreciate how Taberner’s musicianship and diction might have made her a strong Pilar in other respects, particularly in less vocally demanding musical numbers.

Other singers recorded the role of Pilar around the turn of the century, but these cylinders have not survived. For example, a catalogue released in 1900 by Madrid *gabinete* Hugens y Acosta includes recordings by three other *primeras tiples*: Felisa Lázaro, Pilar Pérez, and Carlota

³⁷ “Crónica teatral,” *Diario de Reus*, May 7, 1902, 2; “Espectáculos,” *La tarde*, May 12, 1903, 2; and Garcilaso, “Notas teatrales,” *El eco de Navarra*, January 7, 1905, 2.

³⁸ “Cosas de teatros,” *La correspondencia de España*, September 3, 1903, 1.

³⁹ Trezise, “Recorded Document,” 193.

Sanford.⁴⁰ Lázaro sang the role on stage, but there is no evidence that the other two ever did. From other recordings by these *primeras tiples*, as well as from reviews of their performances, we can conclude that their voices and performing styles were rather different: Pérez—whose stage career was mostly in *zarzuela*, though she recorded Mimì from Puccini's *La Bohème* for Álvaro Ureña⁴¹—had a trained lyric soprano voice; Sanford similarly possessed appreciable vocal abilities and a lighter voice, whereas Lázaro's strong points were, similar to Taberner's, a clear and expressive diction and delivery. The fact that singers with such different voices recorded the same *romanza* raises important questions concerning voice casting in *género chico*; it further suggests, as do written sources, that critics, audiences, and impresarios had fluid ideas of what constituted a good performance of a given role or *romanza*. Two performers might have brought very different sets of skills to the role to equal approbation. This does not mean that composers, audiences, or singers themselves did not notice or appreciate differences between voice types or between different combinations of skills.⁴² Nor does it mean that notions of what constituted a good performance were infinitely fluid. A more productive avenue for future research would be to attempt to establish the parameters within which *género chico* performers, audiences, and critics operated, and to ascertain which combinations of skills might have been regarded as valid in specific contexts and for specific roles, and which ones were regarded as less optimal.

Recording practices further complicate this picture, since we cannot always assume that recordings were a faithful reflection of stage practices in this regard. While *gabinete* operators and their audiences would surely have had a sense of what constituted a good stage performance of a given role, this does not mean that *gabinetes* were always able to hire performers who would meet these expectations.⁴³ A large *gabinete*, such as Hugens y Acosta, could afford to hire multiple singers in all voice types, some

⁴⁰ Hugens y Acosta, *Catálogo de la Sociedad Fonográfica Española Hugens y Acosta* (Madrid, 1899). The only other surviving catalogue of the time, from Valencia *gabinete* Blas Cuesta, does not feature any solo recordings from *Gigantes y cabezudos*.

⁴¹ The recording is at the Biblioteca Nacional de España with the reference number CL/309.

⁴² Indeed, *ligera*, *lirica*, or *dramática* (light, lyric, or dramatic) was often added to the basic *tiplo*, although these were not consistently applied, and it should not be concluded that *zarzuela* had a *Fach* system comparable to opera's. Regidor Arribas, *La voz en la zarzuela*, 14–15. See also Casares, "Voz," 942.

⁴³ Throughout the history of recorded music, there are countless examples of recorded performance influencing stage performance rather than merely the other way around, the best known being perhaps Maria Callas's recordings of roles she never sang on stage. With recording practices still largely experimental and haphazard at the time, and the number of recordings produced small, however, it is difficult to imagine a singer having the same influence solely through recordings in the context of the *gabinetes*.

more famous than others; the same aria or romanza would be offered in their catalogue by different singers. Smaller studios, such as Puerto y Novella in Valencia, did not have access to prestigious singers and relied on a small and seemingly stable pool of singers who recorded broadly within their voice type.⁴⁴ Regordosa, who recorded privately in his home and not for public release, would not have been subject to the same market pressures: he often recorded singers performing arias they would have sung on stage (perhaps as a memento of the live performance experience), but his collection also includes singers performing outside their normal repertoire, perhaps a reflection of the intimate, friendly atmosphere at Regordosa's recording sessions, likely more akin to a private gathering among friends than to a serious concert platform.⁴⁵ In the case of Gurina, who had not sung the role on stage and thus could not hold the same memento value as others, we might entertain the possibility that Regordosa chose her because her voice type was similar to Arana's.

"Por fin te miro, Ebro famoso"

The three surviving recordings of the chorus "Por fin te miro, Ebro famoso" (At last I see you, famous Ebro), also known as "Coro de repatriados" (Chorus of returning soldiers), are representative of some of the issues that pioneers of recording technologies faced when trying to record choruses and ensembles. These difficulties were, on the one hand, technical: recording a group of voices or instruments was more challenging than capturing a solo voice with piano accompaniment.⁴⁶ Recordists tried to overcome this by recording smaller choirs, and the three recordings discussed here possibly did not feature more than six or seven singers each.⁴⁷ On the other hand, we can imagine that *gabinetes* also would have struggled to embed in recorded choruses some of the performative elements that were an essential part of live performances of *género chico*.

⁴⁴ For example, Josefina Huguet seems to have taken on all operatic soprano recordings and recorded within her own *Fach* of light-lyric coloratura, as well as purely lyric repertoire such as "Sì, mi chiamano Mimì" from *La Bohème*; Inés Salvador, covering mezzo-soprano repertoire, recorded both lyric and dramatic roles but also "Quando m'en vo," again from *La Bohème*.

⁴⁵ Two conspicuous examples include Gurina herself singing *Cavalleria rusticana*'s "Voi lo sapete" (Biblioteca de Catalunya, CIL/207) and Josefina Huguet singing Schubert's "Ständchen" (Biblioteca de Catalunya, CIL/346); Huguet specialized in coloratura roles and would have also occasionally sung Spanish and Catalan art song on stage, but not Lied.

⁴⁶ Philip, *Performing Music in the Era of Recording*, 28.

⁴⁷ The same applies to other choral recordings by *gabinetes*, e.g., recordings of Puerto y Novella from *Marina* (FA60/084) and *Cavalleria rusticana* (FA60/096), and by Hijos de Blas Cuesta of *La Africana* (FA60/095) (all signatures from Eresbil-Archivo Vasco de la Música).

Choruses were generally meant to be rousing and inspiring, and they often signaled the moment in which the Spanish *pueblo* (represented here by rank-and-file soldiers returning from the war in Cuba) appeared on stage displaying and celebrating their values, and encouraging audiences to identify with them. Although few of the existing *género chico* histories devote much attention to choruses, we can infer from press sources that the standard of singing and musicianship could vary: some chorus singers (*coristas*) needed intensive coaching from the choir master to learn their music and did not necessarily have full musical or dramatic understanding of the rest of the play,⁴⁸ whereas others had more solid voices and sometimes progressed to solo roles. Examination of chorus scores suggests that, as was the case with solo numbers, clear and expressive delivery of the text was key, as well as a commitment to conveying the appropriate mood.

Although text delivery is not particularly clear in the two surviving *gabinete* recordings of this chorus by Hugens y Acosta and La fonográfica madrileña, both show an attempt at expressiveness and possibly at copying some of the stage practices that audiences would have found appealing. The Hugens y Acosta recording starts with exclamatory and spoken interjections; as with the rest of the text, it is difficult to make out the words, but these exclamations seem designed to convey the excitement and patriotic feeling that the scene would have had on stage. The obviously passionate introduction might have been intended to compensate for the flaws in the recording; apart from the text that was not clearly understandable, the two-voice texture (shown in ex. 2) sounds blurry and undefined.

These off-the-score interjections, however, are not the norm in *gabinete* recordings, which raises two possibilities. The first is that such interjections were not commonly used on stage and the Hugens y Acosta recordist decided to include them as a compensatory mechanism to capture at least some of the mood of the live performance. The other possibility is that such interjections were indeed used on stage but were generally excluded from recordings as a generic convention—in the same way that spoken dialogue and other nonmusical sounds were commonly excluded from *gabinetes* recordings—and in such a uniform way as to suggest that this was a quickly established convention.⁴⁹ With scarce attention dedicated in reviews to choruses in *género chico*

⁴⁸ F. Bello Sanjuán, “El teatro por dentro,” *El arte del teatro*, November 10, 1902, 13.

⁴⁹ The only exception I have been able to find among surviving cylinders is Julia Mesa’s recording of “La tarántula” (from *La tempranica*) for *gabinete* José Navarro (digitized by the Biblioteca de Catalunya together with other cylinders from the private collection of Mariano Gómez-Montejano in a noncommercial CD titled *Cilindres de cera de la colección Mariano Gómez Montejano*, CD 4175).

EXAMPLE 2. “Por fin te miro, Ebro Famoso” (mm. 28–35). Translation: “At last I see you, famous Ebro, you are broader and more beautiful today.”

Por fin te mi - ro E - bro fa - mo - so

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hoy es más an - cho, hoy es más an - cho yes más her - mo - so

performances, it is difficult to ascertain which of the two possibilities might be more plausible. Nevertheless, we can well imagine that the same range of skills available to soloists to deliver an expressive performance (singing, speech, movement, dance) would also have been available to choruses; hence, it would be implausible to assume that they would limit themselves to singing what was printed in the score with no expressive additions. We should thus not reject the possibility that similar interjections were used in at least some live performances.

La fonográfica madrileña was able to capture the texture in a more nuanced way, and this is one example where close listening and

comparison of recordings might help us advance some hypotheses concerning dating. La fonográfica madrileña was active between 1901 and 1905, and this recording would thus have been made toward the end of the *gabinetes* era, so we might imagine that the choral recording benefited from the technological advances and improved know-how of recordists. The Hugens y Acosta recording of the same chorus is, as was the norm, undated, but the remarks above suggest that it might date from an earlier period.⁵⁰ Despite the improved technological capabilities, we cannot automatically assume that the fonográfica madrileña recording is a more accurate reflection of performance practices on stage; some aspects of it were likely still shaped by technological limitations. Text continues to be mostly unintelligible, as in the Hugens y Acosta recording, and the tempo is rather brisk, not completely suitable for a chorus that is ultimately martial. With *gabinetes* recording at the time on two-minute cylinders,⁵¹ the chorus was perhaps recorded at a faster tempo than usual so that it could fit into the cylinder with fewer cuts needed than was the case with the Hugens y Acosta recording.⁵² The dynamic range is similarly limited. This was, again, a well-known issue with wax cylinders, although not completely insurmountable, since some solo recordings produced by certain *gabinetes* do exhibit a modest yet appreciable dynamic range.⁵³ Choral recordings, though, were another matter: Regordosa himself produced a rather successful recording of a section of the Orfeó Catalá (a prominent choral society in Barcelona, performing both Catalan music and highlights of the canonic international repertoire) singing Clément Janequin's *Chant des oiseaux*,⁵⁴ but these improvements are not observed in *gabinete* recordings of choruses. There are several reasons why this might have been the case. Firstly, surviving choral recordings from the *gabinetes* are scarce in

⁵⁰ Further support for this hypothesis comes from Viuda de Aramburo's recording of another chorus from "Los de Calatorao," which similarly renders the polyphonic texture blurred. Since Viuda de Aramburo operated from 1898 to 1900, this recording must perforce date from the early years of the *gabinete* era.

⁵¹ Cylinders could, nevertheless, be extended by 40 or 50 seconds by slowing down the playing speed. Peter Shambarger, "Cylinder Records: An Overview," *ARSC Journal* 26 (1995): 133–61, at 135.

⁵² Researchers, however, disagree on whether tempo acceleration was a widespread strategy to overcome the short duration of cylinders. Zicari ("Ah! non credea mirarti," 194) argues that if acceleration were the norm, then a trend toward more relaxed, slower performances as technology evolved would be observable, which is not the case. Leech-Wilkinson, while not making acceleration one of the fundamental assumptions of his study, occasionally concedes that it could have happened (*Changing Sound of Music*, chap. 3, para. 19).

⁵³ See, for example, María Galvany's recordings of "Ah! Non credea mirarti" from *La sonnambula* and "Adieu beau ravage" from *L'Africaine*, both for Hugens y Acosta (FA60/005 and FA60/006 at Eresbil respectively).

⁵⁴ Biblioteca de Catalunya, CIL/105.

comparison to solo recordings: it might well be that such recordings existed but did not survive. Secondly, it could also be that the difficulties inherent in recording groups of voices discouraged *gabinete* operators, particularly since choral recordings were less popular (and presumably less profitable) than solo ones. The fonográfica madrileña recording does not use interjections to overcome these limitations, but it uses another expressive device to presumably similar ends: a fermata on a high note in the climax of the last phrase before the coda. Although the fermata comes as a bit of a surprise in the middle of the performance's brisk tempo, it is executed gracefully and in a coordinated way.

The 1902 Gramophone recording, by contrast, had fewer technological limitations to overcome: the accompaniment here is played by a brass ensemble instead of a piano, and the textures and dynamics are captured with considerably more accuracy. There are no spoken interjections, nor an unexpected fermata. It is easy to notice by comparison the difficulties that *gabinetes* would have faced in recording choruses and to understand how the spoken interjections and the fermata may have worked as compensatory strategies to achieve performative fidelity. The fact that Hugens y Acosta and La fonográfica madrileña chose different strategies also suggests that the *gabinetes'* quest for performative fidelity must have been experimental to a considerable degree—and, as such, not always entirely successful.

“Luchando tercios y rudos”

The last *jota* to appear in *Gigantes y cabezudos*, “Luchando tercios y rudos” (Stubborn and brave they fight), is sung by Pilar. In the score she is joined by the chorus in the last *accelerando* section; however, as was usual practice with *gabinetes* and early Gramophone recordings, the chorus was not recorded here alongside the soloist, likely because of the logistical and technological complications with recording large numbers of singers. What interests me about this number is how singers and *gabinete* operators dealt with the problem of expressiveness in recordings. Whereas some of the challenges when recording soloists would have been similar to those when recording choirs (limited dynamics, reduced length of cylinders), soloists had a broader palette of tools at their disposal to make their performance expressive, including the use of large- and small-scale tempo changes as well as portamento. This is obvious not only from recordings of “Luchando tercios y rudos” but from the full array of early *género chico* cylinders currently available and digitized.

Relevant for the study of large-scale tempo changes is the fact that all four surviving recordings modified the original structure of the number (see table 2). All four recordings redefined the original *jota* as a strophic song, and all four performers made use of large-scale tempo changes, with a slower verse (section A) contrasting with a faster chorus (sections B and C). This is largely consonant with other recordings of strophic numbers from *género chico*⁵⁵ but also with other vocal music of the period, as analyzed by Massimo Zicari in recordings of *bel canto* cavatinas and cabalettas, for example.⁵⁶ There are, nevertheless, some differences in how individual performers applied these tempo changes. These are most obvious in Ascensión Miralles's recording for Álvaro Ureña, although there is a caveat here concerning issues of cylinder digitization. As heard in the digitized recording at Biblioteca Digital Hispánica, Miralles sings the verses at a speed of ♩ = 120, and the chorus at an astonishing ♩ = 225. The *romanza*'s key in the digitized file is also a full minor third higher than in the score. Even though transposed recordings were not uncommon, both pieces of evidence suggest that the digitization was made at an abnormally high speed and that Miralles would have originally sang at an appreciably slower tempo. It is likely, though, that the original tempo was still comparatively fast, since Miralles was regarded as a singer with a light, agile voice and solid technique who could sing through the flourishes that other *primeras tiples* preferred to skip.⁵⁷ Regardless of the original tempo, we can conclusively infer that Miralles almost doubled the speed of the chorus with respect to the verse, a change more drastic than in any of the other recorded performances. She also introduced some small-scale tempo changes in section A, slowing down the beginnings of phrases and accelerating toward the end (see ex. 3).

Whereas Miralles was relatively respected as a singer,⁵⁸ Blanca del Carmen—who recorded this number and others both for *gabinetes* and for Gramophone—did not have a stage career in Spain or elsewhere. Indeed, biographical sources on her are nonexistent, which suggests she

⁵⁵ Indeed, use of tempo changes is usual in *género chico* numbers with strophic structures, often called *couplets*, e.g., señorita López's recording of *El tambor de granadero*'s "Rataplán" for Blas Cuesta (Eresbil, FA60/047).

⁵⁶ Zicari, "Ah! non credea mirarti."

⁵⁷ Ch., "Teatro Eslava," *El imparcial*, October 3, 1896, 2; "Crónica granadina," *La Alhambra*, July 15, 1898, 279–80; "La zarzuela de Estremera," *Diario de Córdoba*, June 12, 1899, 1; Cirilo, "Teatro-Circo," *Diario de Córdoba*, June 27, 1899, 2; "De teatros," *El país*, April 28, 1900, 4; and Caramanchel, "Eslava," *La correspondencia de España*, September 9, 1900, 3.

⁵⁸ Miralles attracted attention for her singing technique on the occasion of her debut in 1895 at the Teatro Eslava in Madrid; after that, though, most of her career was spent touring the provinces. See A. P., "Eslava," *La correspondencia de España*, September 11, 1895, 1; "Eslava," *La justicia*, September 10, 1895, 3; and "Debut de la señorita Miralles," *El heraldo de Madrid*, September 17, 1895, 2.

TABLE 2.
Structure of “Luchando tercero y rudos” as written
versus as recorded.

| Original score | Recordings |
|--|---|
| Instrumental introduction (88 measures) | Shortened instrumental introduction ^a |
| Section A (“Poco menos,” a bit slower)—sung by Pilar alone | Section A—sung by Pilar alone |
| Section B (“Un poco más,” a bit faster)—sung by Pilar alone | Section B—sung by Pilar alone |
| Section C (“Un poco más sentado,” a bit more settled)—Pilar alone, then response from chorus | Section C—sung by Pilar; no response from chorus |
| Coda—Pilar and chorus | [omitted] |
| | Section A—sung by Pilar alone to a second set of lyrics ^b |
| | Section B—sung by Pilar alone |
| | Section C—sung by Pilar with no response from chorus |

^aDifferent recordings shortened the introduction differently, ranging from 16 to 32 measures.

^bAlthough the quality of the recordings does not allow a full transcription of the lyrics, evidence suggests that the second set of lyrics was different in each recording. Neither of these sets of lyrics came from the libretto of the play itself but were likely newly composed texts of a satirical or political nature. This practice was widespread with well-known *género chico* hits sung in the streets.

might have been a talented amateur with no stage experience, as is the case with other singers who recorded for *gabinetes*. Del Carmen’s recording of the *jota* for Gramophone comes across as the least expressive of the four versions analyzed here. Preceded by a shortened but still rather substantial piano introduction (thirty-two measures), Del Carmen hardly introduced any tempo changes to make up for the lack of dynamic range inherent in cylinders; her diction is understandable, if not particularly expressive. Her *Viuda de Aramburo* recording,

EXAMPLE 3. “Luchando tercós y rudos” (mm. 91–94), showing small-scale tempo change. Metronome markings are approximate since some beats can be slightly longer than others. Translation: “Stubborn and brave they fight.”

Musical notation for Example 3, showing a tempo change from 120 to 172. The score is in 3/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The lyrics are "Lu - chan - do ter - cos y ru - dos".

EXAMPLE 4. “Luchando tercós y rudos” (mm. 118–21), (a) as written and (b) as performed by Del Carmen. Translation: “With the joy of the *jota*.”

(a)

Musical notation for Example 4(a), showing the original score. The score is in 3/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The lyrics are "An - te la a - le - gría a que tie - ne la jo - ta".

(b)

Musical notation for Example 4(b), showing the performance by Del Carmen. The score is in 3/4 time with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The lyrics are "An - te la a - le - gría a que tie - ne la jo - ta".

although poorer in sound quality, reveals a more expressive performer. In contrast to Miralles’s more maximalist approach, Del Carmen focuses on smaller-scale detail: portamento is used very slightly, and the diction is very clear and expressive (to the detriment of consistent vibrato). Section B consists of four phrases, and the last measure of each consists of an eighth note, an eighth-note rest (which follows each time in the middle of a word), an accented quarter note, and an unaccented one. In each phrase, Del Carmen shortens the eighth note to a sixteenth, thereby making the rest longer, and shifts the stress from the second beat to the third (see ex. 4). This also places the phonetic stress on the last syllable of the word, potentially an attempt to mimic the Aragonese accent that would have characterized Pilar’s speech.

These striking differences in Del Carmen’s two recorded performances invite questions about how Spanish performers might have adapted to recording processes and what sort of guidance they might have received from engineers and operators. Written sources on the dynamics of the studio are extremely scarce in the Spanish context,

however, so it is difficult to reach any definitive conclusions on the matter. Moreover, it is often the case that we only have three, two, or even just one surviving recording for a single performer, so advancing hypotheses as to how they might have evolved and changed their recording style will always be tentative. What cases such as Del Carmen's performances nonetheless reveal is again the highly adaptable, quasi-experimental nature of recording processes and the role that performers—as opposed to recordists—might have exerted in introducing performance decisions that perhaps were intended to compensate for the limitations in recording technologies.

The final recording, Navarro's for *Viuda de Aramburo*, is unusual in featuring a male singer performing a female *romanza*. Although this was not common practice either on stage or in *género chico* recordings, the decision is understandable given that "Luchando tercetos y rudos" had become popular and that the lyrics do not at any point refer to the first-person voice in the feminine: it is a patriotic song that could plausibly be sung by individuals of any gender. The cylinder is attributed to señor Navarro with no indication of his first name. There were at least three singers active in these years who could have made the recording: Enrique Navarro, José Navarro (both comic tenors), and Luis Navarro, whose voice type is not known.⁵⁹ The voice in the recording is certainly consistent with what would be expected of a *género chico* comic tenor at that time, thus suggesting that the recording might have been made by Enrique or José. Navarro's voice is not operatically trained, but the singing is relatively in tune and the diction is clear and expressive, again with an attempt at mimicking the Aragonese accent as in Del Carmen's recording. Navarro's timing of the eighth-note rest, however, is not as precise as Del Carmen's, suggesting that his strengths lay in text delivery and diction rather than in musicianship and singing. Navarro did not use portamento or small-scale tempo changes in the chorus either, as his female colleagues did. As with the examples of Taberner and Gurina above, this can be interpreted as further proof that different *género chico* singers brought different combinations of skills to the stage (or recording studio), and at least some of those would have been regarded as equally valid. But beyond individual differences, the recording also reveals crucial differences between male and female performers, which are further confirmed by written sources from the period.⁶⁰ While many,

⁵⁹ María Luz González Peña, "Enrique Navarro," "Luis Navarro," and "José Navarro," in *Diccionario de la zarzuela: España e Hispanoamérica*, ed. Emilio Casares (Madrid: Instituto Complutense de Ciencias Musicales, 2006), 2339. There was also a *gabinete* owner called José Navarro, but this was not the same person as the singer.

⁶⁰ Deleito y Piñuela, *Origen y apogeo del "género chico"*, xiii; and Muñoz, *Historia de la zarzuela*, 145.

though not all, of the noted *primeras tiple*s of the time had solid, trained singing voices, male performers were more likely to capitalize on their diction and spoken expressiveness, and less likely to borrow from operatic performance practices.⁶¹

Conclusion

My analyses of recordings from *Gigantes y cabezudos* open new directions for the continued exploration of the relatively underexplored field of vocal performance practices in *género chico*, which I briefly summarize here. I am particularly concerned with determining where we might need to deviate from paths established by previous research in other genres and contexts. The study of *género chico* can clearly benefit greatly from this body of research: from studies that allow us to grapple with the limitations of early technologies, to studies of how parameters such as vibrato, portamento, and tempo modification were used for expressive aims in other genres that were, to a great extent, part of the same sound world as *género chico*. Studies of performance practice in *género chico* should not treat the genre as completely separate from other genres and traditions, but they must also adopt a context-sensitive approach, carefully considering both the culture that surrounded the genre and the recording processes and enterprises unique to Spain in the years around 1900. In this article I have attempted to provide practical examples of how findings from existing research on early recordings, as well as my own research on the Spanish context, can be drawn upon to contextualize and illuminate individual recordings. The process, however, is not straightforward: the lack of written records, the deterioration of cylinders, or the scarcity of recordings may make it impossible, in many cases, to confirm or to refute a hypothesis; on the other hand, it is to be expected that, if more and more *género chico* cylinders are analyzed, comparisons among them may also illuminate issues that cannot at present be dealt with conclusively.

I would like to highlight two respects in which *género chico* performance practice might differ from established wisdom in other genres. Firstly, as I have mentioned, we must grapple with the idea that notions of what constituted a good *género chico* performance were fluid and varied, with performers exhibiting different combinations of skills. Nevertheless, there is still work to be done to understand how these notions were defined and how they evolved for different types of audiences, as well as to determine the role that recordings could have had

⁶¹ A further example comes from bass Manuel O. Keyser's recording of the couplets of *El lucero del Alba* for Blas Cuesta (Eresbil, FA60/251).

in influencing these processes. In this respect, reviews and other historical accounts are key in ascertaining how the *género chico* community viewed and appraised individual styles and performers, what kinds of styles and strengths were valued, and where disagreements might have developed. The discussion above suggests that focus on expressive delivery of the text was regarded as crucial to the genre and likely guided appraisals and performing decisions (both in the studio and live). Expressiveness, though, might not have been fully synonymous with intelligibility; in chorus recordings, or solo recordings with ample vibrato, performers might have chosen instead to emphasize or elongate certain words. Further research may illuminate how text delivery was understood and practiced within *género chico*. Studying how gender (and perhaps other factors, such as age) influenced the different skills that performers were expected or allowed to develop can also help us clarify notions of what different audiences might have regarded as a good performance. Here again we must consider the possibility that some combinations of skills would have translated better than others into recorded sound, and that some performers might have emphasized certain skills at the expense of others in recordings, thus marking the beginnings of the distinction between live and recorded performance in the *género chico* context.

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Secondly, we must bear in mind the rapidly changing, quasi-experimental nature of the *gabinete* business in two respects that are intrinsically connected: on the one hand, *gabinetes* developed ingenious ways of overcoming the technological limitations of their products; on the other, they pioneered and developed within Spain the concept of recording itself as a commercial and aesthetic artifact. Perhaps more so than with other early recordings (given the stubbornly independent and idiosyncratic nature of the *gabinetes*), we must become comfortable with the notion that tried-and-tested solutions did not exist and that what we hear in recordings was often experimental. In the same way that the industry of the *gabinetes* was to a great extent artisanal, our research might be better served by adopting a similar approach—never losing sight of the broader contexts that shaped these recordings, but always bearing in mind that each recording would have been shaped by these contexts in a unique, individual way.

ABSTRACT

This article makes an initial contribution to the largely unexplored field of historical performance practice in *zarzuela* by examining the earliest surviving recordings of Manuel Fernández Caballero's *Gigantes y*

cabezudos (1898). One of the greatest successes of the *género chico* sub-genre of *zarzuela* during the early years of commercial phonography in Spain, it is also the *zarzuela* of which the most recordings made before 1905 have survived: nineteen, made on wax cylinders by local *gabinetes fonográficos* and on disc by Gramophone. Both the thriving *género chico* culture and its singing practices, as well as the technological, commercial, and cultural aspects of the early recording industry in Spain, are discussed to consider how recordings related to live performance in this particular context, what the value is of these recordings as documents of performance practice, and what questions they open up for further study of performance practice in *zarzuela*.

Keywords: *zarzuela*, performance practice, early recordings, phonograph, musical theater