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**“GUILLAUME
APOLLINAIRE:
A REFERENCE IN THE LIFE
AND MUSICAL WORKS OF THE
SPANISH COMPOSER JOSÉ
SOLER CASABÓN”**

**GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE: UNA REFERENCIA EN LA VIDA Y OBRA
MUSICAL DEL COMPOSITOR ESPAÑOL JOSÉ SOLER CASABÓN**

RESUMEN

El presente artículo recoge la biografía de José Soler Casabón, compositor de origen aragonés que vivió y desarrolló su carrera artística durante las primeras décadas del pasado siglo XX entre Barcelona y París. De las diferentes obras del autor, se describirá el Ballet *L'homme sans yeux sans nez et sans oreilles* (HOSYNO) el cual se basó en el poema *Le musicien de Saint Merry* de poeta francés Guillaume Apollinaire y cuyos decorados se encargaron a Pablo Picasso. Por diversos motivos como fueron el contexto bélico y el cambio de dirección del teatro de ópera de París, el ballet nunca llegó a estrenarse.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Apollinaire, ballet, Barcelona, compositor, José Soler Casabón, París, Apollinaire.

ABSTRACT

This article summarizes the biography of José Soler Casabón, an Aragonese composer who lived and developed his artistic career during the first decades of the 20th century between Barcelona and Paris. From the different works of the author, the Ballet *L'homme sans yeux sans nez et sans oreilles* (HOSYNO) will be described. This ballet was based on the poem *Le musicien de Saint Merry* written by the french poet Guillaume Apollinaire and its sets were commissioned to Pablo Picasso. For various reasons, such as the war context and the change of the director of the opera house in Paris, the ballet was never performed

KEYWORDS

Apollinaire, ballet, Barcelona, composer, José Soler Casabón, París, Apollinaire.

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INTRODUCTION

José Soler Casabón was born on August 31, 1884, in Mequinenza (Zaragoza, Spain), and died on March 3, 1964, in Paris, in absolute misery. Soler Casabón was an outstanding musician and composer of the twentieth century. He was the son of Tomás Soler Ibarz, a merchant from Mequinenza and Inocencia Casabón Marín from Samper de Calanda (Zaragoza, Spain), a teacher who taught in the local school in Mequinenza, from 1869 to 1901 and later in Barcelona from 1901 to 1905.

Picture 1

Soler Casabón's house (Mequinenza)



José Soler Casabón lived most of his life in Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia, where he studied music. By the age of 15 he had composed pieces of music for violin and piano, two sonatas and five melodies to accompany Catalan poems. In addition to the piano, José Soler Casabón mastered classical guitar and was an excellent violinist. He had close friendships with other well-known residents of Barcelona. One of these was Pablo Gargallo, a sculptor and painter born in 1881 in Maella (Zaragoza). Another artist who lived in Barcelona at the same time as Soler Casabón and who greatly admired him was the great French poet Pierre Reverdy who said that "Soler was one of the most intelligent and brightest persons he had known, the only person you could talk to man to man, face to face" (Soupault, 1983).

His mother, Inocencia Casabón, most likely wanted to move to Barcelona to accompany her son as supported him in his musical studies. Thus, on November 5, 1901 she requested a transfer to teach in a school in Barcelona. She succeeded in gaining permission and was able to stop teaching in Mequinenza and move to Barcelona on November 26, 1901. At that time, Jose Soler Casabón was already 17 years old. During the first decades of the twentieth century, Paris was becoming an internationally

renowned cultural and artistic city. That is why a large number of artists, be it painters, sculptors, musicians, converged there. For this reason, two years after settling in Barcelona, Soler Casabón decided to move to the French capital where he moved to number 3, rue Vercingétorix, in the Parisian neighborhood of Montparnasse.

During this Parisian period, Soler Casabón studied and composed sonatas, motets and fugues, following the guidelines of the great masters in music history such as Antonio de Cabezón and Johann Sebastian Bach. In Paris, he got in touch with avant-garde artists and established friendly, yet sometimes difficult relationships with various artists and writers of his time such as Guillaume Apollinaire, Pierre Reverdy, Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró and Josep Llorens Artigas. In October 1903, his Aragonese friend, Pablo Gargallo, resided in the studio of Soler Casabón during his first trip to Paris.

In 1904, Soler Casabón composed *Madrigal for baritone and piano*, based on a poem by Francesc Sitjà i Pineda (1880-1940), which he translated from Catalan to French. It was probably one of the compositions he composed in Barcelona between 1899 and 1900, and which he mentioned during a radio interview in Paris in 1953¹. During 1913 and 1914, Soler Casabón visited Pablo Picasso in his studio in Paris on various occasions. (Top, 2004).

Although he was an excellent violinist he preferred to play the guitar with his friends. Also, during this period, as he had financial problems, he collaborated in different cabaret orchestras. From 1912 until 1920, Soler Casabón wrote several poetic essays. In 1914, Soler Casabón returned to Barcelona, where he lived in Pablo Gargallo's home. And in November of that year, he composed *L'Hiver sur les Champs*, which he later reviewed and orchestrated in 1915.

On June 16, 1917, at the Apollinaire presentation of *Oeuvre de Soldat dans la Tranchée*, a piano piece from Soler Casabón was performed, *Soliloque*. *The North-South* journal published that same month an article in which Pierre Reverdy stated that "Soler is considered to be a revelation musician, demonstrated by his remarkable talents. Nonetheless, too much is expected from this musician who has just appeared in the Parisian musical scene".

¹ Soler Casabón interview by Jean Bouret. Estudio 27 RTF, July 28, 1953, Paris.



Picture 2

Picture of José Soler Casabón

LE MUSICIEN DE SAINT MERRY

In 1917 Apollinaire decided to create a ballet based on his poem *Le Musicien de Saint Merry*, which had appeared in his work *Calligrammes*.

Le musicien de Saint–Merry

*J'ai enfin le droit de saluer des êtres que je ne connais pas
Ils passent devant moi et s'accumulent au loin
Tandis que tout ce que j'en vois m'est inconnu
Et leur espoir n'est pas moins fort que le mien
Je ne chante pas ce monde ni les autres astres
Je chante toutes les possibilités de moi-même hors de ce monde et des astres
Je chante la joie d'errer et le plaisir d'en mourir*

Le 21 du mois de mai 1913

*Passeur des morts et les mordonnantes mériennes⁶⁵
Des millions de mouches éventaient une splendeur
Quand un homme sans yeux sans nez et sans oreilles⁶⁶
Quittant le Sébaste entra dans la rue Aubry-le-Boucher
Jeune l'homme était brun et ce couleur de fraise sur les joues
Homme Ah! Ariane
Il jouait de la flûte et la musique dirigeait ses pas⁶⁷
Il s'arrêta au coin de la rue Saint-Martin
Jouant l'air que je chante et que j'ai inventé
Les femmes qui passaient s'arrêtaient près de lui
Il en venait de toutes parts
Lorsque tout à coup les cloches de Saint-Merry se mirent à sonner
Le musicien cessa de jouer et but à la fontaine
Qui se trouve au coin de la rue Simon-Le-Franc
Puis Saint-Merry se tut
L'inconnu reprit son air de flûte
Et revenant sur ses pas marcha jusqu'à la rue de la Verrerie
Où il entra suivi par la troupe des femmes
Qui sortaient des maisons
Qui venaient par les rues traversières les yeux fous
Les mains tendues vers le mélodieux ravisseur
Il s'en allait indifférent jouant son air
Il s'en allait terriblement*

Puis ailleurs

À quelle heure un train partira-t-il pour Paris

À ce moment

Les pigeons des Moluques fientaient des noix muscades

En même temps

Mission catholique de Bôma qu'as-tu fait du sculpteur

Ailleurs

Elle traverse un pont qui relie Bonn à Beuel et disparaît à travers Pützchen

Au même instant

Une jeune fille amoureuse du maire

Dans un autre quartier
Rivalise donc poète avec les étiquettes des parfumeurs

En somme ô rieurs vous n'avez pas tiré grand-chose des hommes
Et à peine avez-vous extrait un peu de graisse de leur misère
Mais nous qui mourons de vivre loin l'un de l'autre
Tendons nos bras et sur ces rails roule un long train de marchandises

Tu pleurais assise près de moi au fond d'un fiacre

Et maintenant
Tu me ressembles tu me ressembles malheureusement

Nous nous ressemblions comme dans l'architecture du siècle dernier
Ces hautes cheminées pareilles à des tours

Nous allons plus haut maintenant et ne touchons plus le sol

Et tandis que le monde vivait et variait
Le cortège des femmes long comme un jour sans pain
Suivait dans la rue de la Verrerie l'heureux musicien

Cortèges ô cortèges
C'est quand jadis le roi s'en allait à Vincennes
Quand les ambassadeurs arrivaient à Paris
Quand le maigre Suger se hâtait vers la Seine
Quand l'émeute mourait autour de Saint-Merry

Cortèges ô cortèges
Les femmes débordaient tant leur nombre était grand
Dans toutes les rues avoisinantes
Et se hâtaient raides comme balle
Afin de suivre le musicien
Ah ! Ariane et toi Pâquette et toi Amine
Et toi Mia et toi Simone et toi Mavise
Et toi Colette et toi la belle Geneviève
Elles ont passé tremblantes et vaines
Et leurs pas légers et prestes se mouvaient selon la cadence
De la musique pastorale qui guidait
Leurs oreilles avides

L'inconnu s'arrêta un moment devant une maison à vendre
Maison abandonnée
Aux vitres brisées
C'est un logis du seizième siècle
La cour sert de remise à des voitures de livraisons
C'est là qu'entra le musicien
Sa musique qui s'éloignait devint langoureuse
Les femmes le suivirent dans la maison abandonnée
Et toutes y entrèrent confondues en bande
Toutes toutes y entrèrent sans regarder derrière elles
Sans regretter ce qu'elles ont laissé
Ce qu'elles ont abandonné
Sans regretter le jour la vie et la mémoire
Il ne resta bientôt plus personne dans la rue de la Verrerie
Sinon moi-même et un prêtre de Saint-Merry
Nous entrâmes dans la vieille maison

Mais nous n'y trouvâmes personne
Voici le soir
À Saint-Merry c'est l'Angélus qui sonne
Cortèges ô cortèges
C'est quand jadis le roi revenait de Vincennes
Il vint une troupe de casquettiers
Il vint des marchands de bananes
Il vint des soldats de la garde républicaine
Ô nuit
Troupeau de regards langoureux des femmes
Ô nuit
Toi ma douleur et mon attente vaine
J'entends mourir le son d'une flûte lointaine

Soler Casabón, who at that time was in Paris, was commissioned by Apollinaire to compose the musical part of this huge artistic work. The first version of *Le Musicien de Saint-Merry* was named *À quelle heure le train partirait-il pour Paris?* It was conceived by Apollinaire based on his poem, the music was composed by Alberto Savinio, the sets were created by Francis Picabia and the dances were choreographed by Marius de Zayas. But in the end, the project did not take place because of the start of the Great War. It would be Soler Casabón who took over the project in 1917, slightly modified and renamed by Apollinaire *L'Homme sans yeux, sans nez et sans oreilles*. In 1916, the reappearance of Apollinaire's figure symbolized the renewal of intellectual activities. Authors like Raoul Dufy, Pierre Reverdy or André Breton returned to gather with the master, as Apollinaire was known. Poets who represented the "young literature" of that period hoped to get Apollinaire's patronage. Breton observed that poems composed by Apollinaire at the battlefield still possessed the same passion as his earlier works. "In *Calligrammes*, the worst realities of the time were sidestepped, the most legitimate worries ignored, all in favor of playfulness. [...] Apollinaire had reacted to the appalling war with a desire to plunge back into childhood. [...] I believe that in this person, his poetry had been unable to rise to the task. In my opinion, it was stricken by inadequacy. This is no doubt what made me so attentive to a message of an entirely different order." (Aragon, 1920)

There is no doubt that ballets were the fashion shows of the first decades of the twentieth century. Aspiring to compose music for a ballet was also the ultimate challenge for composers

of that time, and Soler Casabón was not an exception. *Russian Ballets* was a famous ballet company created in 1907 by the Russian businessman Sergei Diaghilev, made up of the best members of the Imperial Ballet of the Mariinsky Theatre of St. Petersburg and directed by the great choreographer Marius Petipa. In 1909, the company began touring internationally and in 1911 became completely independent from the Imperial Ballets. The first residence of the company was at the *Théâtre Mogador* in Paris and then it traveled to Monte Carlo, Paris and London. The company caused a sensation in Western Europe thanks to the great vitality of the Russian school compared to the ballet performed in France at that time.

The poem *Le Musicien de Saint-Merry* is about a flutist without face, who travels through an ancient Parisian neighborhood and whose life is juxtaposed to a realistic picture of daily life. It is in Soler Casabón's ballet adaptation where the audience finds for the first time *L'homme sans yeux sans nez et sans oreilles* (HOSYNO), a strangely disfigured man surrounded by an extremely somber environment. Subsequently, during the 1918 season while at the *Théâtre du Châtelet* in Paris, the work was entitled *Le Musicien de Saint-Merry*. The premiere seemed a success: ballet decorations created by the famous and distinguished Pablo Picasso, poetry written by the outstanding French poet Apollinaire and music created by the Spanish composer Soler Casabón.

Calligrammes not only represented a decisive step towards the poet's career, but also meant the introduction of a topic that would later become relevant in Western art and literature,

and for reasons no one could have foreseen. *L'homme sans yeux, sans nez et sans oreilles*, which closely linked history and modern sensibility, was adopted by writers and artists as an existential symbol of the twentieth century. Still today, the drama of life and death continues to produce intense emotions for readers and spectators.

In March 1917, the journal SIC (1916-1919), which was edited by the poet and sculptor Pierre Albert-Birot, saw the birth of a rival journal, *Nord-Sud*, one which was more open to Futurism and edited by the poet Pierre Reverdy. The first issue of *Nord-Sud* opened with an editorial by Reverdy, "*Not too long ago young poets wanted to find Verlaine and rescue him from obscurity. Is it surprising that we have found the right moment right to rally around Guillaume Apollinaire.*" (*Nord-Sud*, 1917) Basically, the authors who collaborated in most of the *Nord-Sud* issues were Guillaume Apollinaire, Max Jacob, Pierre Reverdy, Paul Dermée, Roch Grey, Léonard Pieux, and Vicente Huidobro. Regardless of the movement to which they belonged, these and other authors emphasized through their writings the atmosphere in which they lived in the French capital during those dark years.

On May 18, 1917, the ballet *Parade*, composed for the most famous ballet entrepreneur Sergei Diaghilev, premiered at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris. Picasso designed the ballet sets, Léonide Massine staged the choreography and Erik Satie composed the music. Soler Casabón probably attended the premiere. In the program, Apollinaire celebrated the "... *alliance of painting and dance with music, a sign of the advent of a more complete art...*" which he welcomed with a new term: surrealism (Top, 2004).

In June of 1917, Soler Casabón composed a version of the ballet for two pianos and finalized it five months later. In a letter, written in French, he confesses to Picasso, "*I have written this music from beginning to end with great enthusiasm. I can assure you that it is almost impossible to find anything wrong; everything is funny, since I have created it not only with the heart and the head, but with all my body, and in certain passages, with all my passion*"² (Top, 2004:18).

In November of 1917, Soler Casabón finished the score of the ballet, a version for two pianos, that Apollinaire had commissioned him to do.

Unfortunately Apollinaire died on November 9, 1918 due that year's outbreak of the Spanish flu. The origin of this extremely virulent and lethal virus known as the Spanish flu is now almost certainly determined to have originated in a military camp of the United States Army in 1918 in China. The virus is said to have traveled first with the ships of American soldiers joining the Western Front, only to affect Spain during a second phase of the outbreak. Soler Casabón was greatly discouraged and decided to return to Barcelona where he wrote in French *I put this music to a folder*. (Top, 2004:11) Apollinaire's death, the consequences of the war, and the different director changes at the Opera in Paris, were all obstacles which delayed the premiere of Soler's latest work. As a result of the war, several concert halls had closed their doors and music took refuge in unusual places.

In 1918, Soler Casabón composed *Crepuscles*, three pieces for piano, inspired by the surroundings of Barcelona, near the Costa Street in Barcelona, where the famous sculptor Pablo Gargallo lived. However in 1924, Gargallo moved definitively to Paris.

Soler Casabón returned to Mequinenza, where he undertook a land reform project and lived there until 1938. He tried to grow two crops per year of some products, and rationalized the birth of goats. Nonetheless, he also played the violin and gave music lessons. From 1932 to 1939, the second poetic stage of Soler Casabón took place. In 1932, the film *Le Picador* directed by Lucien Jaquelux, was released in France with music composed by Soler Casabón. One of the songs, *Le Vitoz* is a French adaptation of the famous Spanish song *El Vito*. Other pieces, such as *La Zambomba* and *Le Chant de Picador* with lyrics written by H. D'Astier, and *Viva Vicente*, with lyrics and music composed by Soler Casabón, were also part of the film.

It was Cocteau – whom Apollinaire called the "intriguing chameleon" -- who ousted Soler's music. Pierre Reverdy refers to this in *Le Voleur de Talan*, a novel published in 1917. Cocteau, who did not like the avant-gardes, including

² José Soler's letter written to Picasso, 1917. Picasso Museum. Paris.

Varese nor Soler Casabón, would slip into the role played by Apollinaire. For the French poet Pierre Reverdy, the avant-garde musician was Soler Casabón, and not Satie, considering him a man of the last century, esoteric and unoriginal.

In 1920, André Breton, Philippe Soupalt, Paul Eluard and Louis Aragon organized poetic *matinées* called the *Vendredis de Littérature*. Musicians like Satie and the well-known *Groupe des Sis*³ were invited to the first of these sessions. Pierre Reverdy wanted some of Soler Casabón's compositions to be performed, although once again luck did not accompany the musician, because the *Group of Six* boycotted him. Consequently, Reverdy refused to participate in the event.

The *Group of Six* was able to get closer to Apollinaire's works and to show interest in the musicality of his poems. They composed music for a great number and diverse collection of his poems, more than any other musicians had before. For example, Marcelle Taillefesse, a member of the *Group of Six*, composed *L'Adieu du Cavalier* based on a text from Guillaume Apollinaire, in memory of Francis Poulenc, for both voice and piano. Arthur Honegger, in August 1915, composed a melody for the poem *Automne* from the collection *Alcools*⁴, and in 1916, he composed two melodies for *Clotilde* and *À la Santé*. With the exception of Arthur Honegger and Germaine Albert-Birot, no musician composed music for Apollinaire during his lifetime. After his death, many classical and other composers, attracted by the simple, exquisite and singular musicality of Apollinaire's poems, wanted to set his poems to music. Apollinaire's poetry, according to the French poet and novelist Louise Aragon, "...is above all a curiosity of the unknowable" (Aragon, 1930).

Apollinaire's play entitled *Les mamelles de Tirésias* occupies an exceptional place in Francis Poulenc's production, which was adapted into an opera. The masterpiece marks Poulenc's debut on the operatic scene, deploying on a large scale the Apollinarian universe from which he has been nourished since his first steps as a composer. "I only had to strictly follow Apollinaire's text to find the musical tone," explains

Poulenc (Poulenc, 1954). The musician thus finds in the poetry the ideal language material source, themes, style and form, thus the opera *Les mamelles de Tirésias* agglutinates all that is lively and joyful to him. Poulenc exposes, "Perhaps it is the work that I prefer, the rarest work. Maybe I could rewrite the *Stabat*, however, *Les Mamelles*, I couldn't do" (Poulenc, 1956).

In 1934, a renewed enthusiasm inspired Soler Casabón who orchestrated the *Prelude* and the first painting for *L'homme sans yeux, sans nez et sans oreilles* (*HOSYNO*). The manuscript of the musical composition consisted of 22 pages with 32 musical staves. The orchestra of this first version included: two flutes and one small flute; two oboes and an English horn; a small clarinet in E flat, two clarinets in B flat and a bass clarinet in B flat; a tenor saxophone in B flat, a Heckelhorn, four bassoons including one contrabassoon, four horns in F and four trumpets in C; three paper clips and a snorkel; a timpani, a snare drum, a bass drum, a triangle, a cymbal and a basque drum; some stamps, a celesta, two harps, a piano and a string quintet.

This was indeed a fairly classical orchestra without the addition of exotic instruments or sound effects. Soler Casabón's modernity does not require the addition of specific sound effects. It is all about the music itself. The use of a Heckelhorn, an instrument whose roots go back to the *Musette Bass*, is a kind of baritone oboe whose range is between the English horn and the bassoon. It was invented by Wilhelm Heckel and presented to the public in 1904 at the *Villa Wahnfried*. Another distinguishing characteristic of the composition of this orchestra was the use of a saxophone. Debussy and Indy used it, but this instrument won its letters of nobility in the classical orchestra only with Pierre Vellones, who made a systematic use of it from 1929 onwards. It is not impossible that Vellones' research may have influenced Soler Casabón.

At the start of World War II in September 1939, Soler Casabón began to plan his move to Venezuela. On June 1, 1940, he wrote to Picasso, asking him for 20,000 francs in order to finance his move to the South American country.

³ "Les Six" is the name given to a group of six French composers who worked in Montparnasse. Their music is often seen as a reaction against both the musical style of Richard Wagner and the impressionist music of Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel.

⁴ *Alcools* is a collection of poems by the French author Guillaume Apollinaire. It was published in 1913.

The letter arrived at the Parisian house of the painter where the Germans came upon it. As a result, Soler Casabón lived part of this early war period under the protection of the German artist and engraver, Albert Mentzel, also known as Flocon.

On December 23, 1939 in Toulouse, Soler Casabón had 34 copies of his collection of poems *Fonds Perdu* printed at his own expense. Thirty copies were printed on straw paper and he had them numbered from 1 to 30, while the other four were printed on canvas paper. The collection was dedicated to Professor Camille Soûla, Honorary Professor of Occupational Physiology at the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers de Paris. In early May of the following year, Soler Casabón sent this collection to various friends, including to his great friend Pierre Reverdy, to which he dedicated the second poem. *Souhait* is one of the poems included in *Fonds Perdu* dedicated to music. Written originally in French, both the French and English versions are below.

Souhait

*Je suis comme un oiseau
Qui aurait perdu son chant
Je suis un musicien
Perdu dans le lointain
De sons insoupçonnés.
Je veux que mes paroles
Deviennent des paraboles
D'une langue n'existant
Et veux que de mes pas
A la démarche chimérique
Un chant énigmatique
S'élève à la grève*

WARTIME YEARS

During the wartime years of 1940-1945, the trace of the musician is lost. He lived as he could, radicalized his music, breaking with the aesthetic movements of the early twentieth century and addressing the most radical modernism. His stylistic orientation goes through the exploration of a system that he called *système commatic* approaching a style more similar to Schönberg, Debussy or Stravinsky. He structured and used his musical language intensively. In

fact, the division of the scales was not arranged into tones and semitones but into quartertones and commas. Soler obviously used special signs for these notations. Already in 1864, in Moscow, a two-manual piano tuned in quartertones had been invented and the Russian composer Skriabine prepared the advent of micro-intervals. However, only Obouhov and Wyschnegradski, greatly influenced by Skriabine, continued along this path. Soler Casabón rushed towards the avant-garde by using this system. He was in contact with Ivan Wyschnegradski through his writings, which were published in 1923 in *La Revue Musicale*. Examination of Soler's style reveals that he was also well aware of Schönberg's approaches in the serial domain and familiar with Debussy and Stravinsky's works.

In 1945 Picasso received Soler Casabón. In a letter directed later to Picasso, he indicated that the visit with the painter had been a real gift. Soler Casabón did not give up in his attempts to represent his ballet. Thus, in 1945 he performed a concert, probably from the pianistic version, under the sponsorship of Roger Désormière, who was at that time one of the executives of the Opera in Paris. Désormière discovered that, in spite of the time that had elapsed, Soler's music had preserved all of its freshness and timeliness. Once the audition was over, he suggested to the composer that "... a work by Apollinaire with Picasso and your music will be an event..." Désormière thus recommended that the composer meet with Picasso to prepare the orchestration and division of the scenes, and he would do whatever was necessary to ensure its representation at the Opera in Paris. Soler Casabón, under the influence of previous conversations with Apollinaire, set to work on the conception of the show. The realization of this staging took place in the year 1945, and it is at this time when the title *HOSYNO* is replaced by that of *Le Musicien de Saint-Merry*. However, once again luck evaded Soler as Désormière had to leave the position he occupied at the Paris Opera in 1945. Although the reputation of this group formed by Apollinaire, Picasso, Désormière and Serge Lifar was undoubtedly high, the fate of this project was once again impossible to predict.

Soler worked hard to design this show and ensure that the project would come to fruition. Throughout 1945, Soler Casabón worked on imagining the staging and recalling the conversations he had had with Apollinaire. On the final

draft, the title HOSYNO has been crossed out to make way for the definitive title *Le Musicien de Saint-Merry*. The 95-page musical manuscript is written on 36 staves of music paper with a dry stamp indicating its origin: Flammarion, 22, rue de Vaugirard. This second orchestration consisted of: two flutes and one small flute; two oboes, one English horn and a small clarinet in E flat; two clarinets in B flat and a bass clarinet in B flat; one alto saxophone in E flat, three bassoons and one contrabassoon which on page 50 was replaced by a double bass sarrusophone; four horns in F, a small trumpet in D, three trumpets in C, two paper clips and one bass paper clip; a snorkel, a timpani, a snare drum and a bass drum; a triangle cymbal bass drum, and a basque drum; a few stamps and a celesta; two harps, a piano and a string quintet with possibly a five string double bass.

The analysis of this second more complex orchestration reveals that Soler thought about the arrangements as if they were to hypothetically perform the concert at the Paris Opera. The tempos are generally slower and more lega-

to. The sarrusophone, invented by Gautrot to compete with the saxophone, was named after the chief of harmony Sarrus, who had conceived the idea of this instrument. The final manuscript was registered with SACEM under the number 650069 and for which the preliminary observations were more developed.

In any case, Soler Casabón did not give up and on November 11, 1948, coinciding with the Concerts du jeudi, he performed *L'homme sans yeux, sans nez et sans oreilles* (HOSYNO), at the Paris Washington study. This concert was broadcast to the Paris region from the Paris-Inter radio station. The success he achieved from the performance encouraged him to continue on with his fight to present this work in a theatre, especially as it would be the best tribute that could be rendered to his friend Apollinaire. In 1949, Soler Casabón orchestrated *Diurnes*, a manuscript entitled, *A Printemps*. He gave it to Pierrette Gargallo, with the following dedication, "Pour Pierrette Gargallo (Petite Pió Pió) ces cris d'âme-in comb. J. Soler Casabón Paris Février 1950."

Picture 3

Fragment of the score *Diurne*



From 1949 until 1950, Soler Casabón resided in Paris, the city of artists, at 7, rue d'Arsonval. On July 28, 1953, he was invited to participate in a radio program, directed by the art critic and writer Jean Bouret. After extending the merits of Soler Casabón, Bouret announced the possible premiere of *Le Musicien de Saint-Merry* at the Paris Opera. The retransmission ended with a performance of the three pieces of *Crépuscules* by the prestigious French pianist René Herbin. During the broadcast Soler Casabón was asked if he was Aragonese. Soler pointed out, with a perceptible emotionality, that he was from Mequinenza, where the Segre river joins the Ebro river.

FINAL YEARS

During the first months of 1955, Soler approached Philippe Erlanger, director of the Association Française d'Action Artistique, to request his assistance to convince Maurice Lehman, director of the Theaters Lyriques Nationaux, to allow Soler to represent the ballet at the Paris Opera. On April 1, 1955, the Reading Committee of the Réunion des Théâtres Lyriques Nationaux informed Soler that a favorable decision had been reached. This renewed opportunity encouraged Soler Casabón to write Picasso once again, recalling the good reception he had had on stage with the ballet at the time of *Désomière*. Soler asked him to create the set design with the aim to realize Apollinaire's wishes, but unfortunately Picasso did not answer his request and consequently the scenography was not made.

In the same letter, written to Picasso in French, Soler Casabón, explained to the man whom he considered his friend, "I find myself as one who dies of thirst before a crystalline source, I do not do pathos or literature, everything I say is true and sincere (...) You have become a kind of magician that only by announcing his name, the roads open, so it is natural that he comes in search of your courage..." The great work that Soler Casabón had been waiting to see represented for 38 years, was once again put aside. On June 30, 1960, Pablo Picasso sent a postcard to Soler Casabón with a drawing and the word MANJA (eat) which he signed at a later date, October 26, 1960. He sent it to the musician to help him obtain economic resources from the sale of the drawing.

Soler Casabón lived his last days in extreme poverty, and despite the hardships, he main-

tained a strong sense of personal pride. After being hit by a car, his physical condition greatly worsened as he could hardly speak or write. In 1961, he signed a petition for assistance due to economic hardship at the Town Hall of Paris in Montparnasse. His health continued to decline and after a fainting spell, he was admitted to the Hospice of Villejuif. The artist Louis Joly, visited him frequently, and noticed that he was barely eating. On March 9, 1964, at 10:15 a.m., José Soler Casabón died.

His neighbors on rue Arsonval, unaware of the value of some of his belongings, began to destroy them. Thanks to the timely intervention of Joly and his wife, the composer Suzanne Joly, it was possible to save some documents and scores, three phonograph discs (the only existing recordings of the voice of Soler Casabón) and, most importantly, the score of the orchestra and the manuscripts of *Le musicien de Saint-Merry*, which, with an admirable calligraphy, had been written Soler Casabón.

CONCLUSIONS

Mequinenza, the town where he was born, rediscovered the figure of José Soler Casabón in 2009, on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of his birth. For this reason, a concert of his recovered scores was held and received with great enthusiasm by the locals. One of the pieces performed at the event was the 1917 version of *Le musicien de Saint Merry*, with two pianos. This was the very first time the work had been interpreted in Spain. It should be remembered that this had been one of Soler Casabón's greatest projects and which he composed during his time in the French capital. Others included in the concert were *L'hiver sur les champs*, the absolute premiere of a piece he composed during the First World War while living in Barcelona, as well as *Nocturne* and *Crépuscules*, also composed when he was living with the Gargallo family.

Today, the figure of José Soler Casabón continues to resonate in large part due to the work of Jordi Estruga, a historian from Barcelona whose parents were born in Mequinenza. He has closely researched the life and work of the musician for the past 15 years. There have been several events and celebrations that have been carried out in memory of Soler Casabón and his figure and legacy. Concerts have been carried out mainly in his hometown as well as other locations where Soler's work has aroused

the interest of his fellow citizens. In 2015, in the city of Lleida, Jordi Estruga gave a lecture entitled, *José Soler Casabón, a musician in the Parisian avant-garde*, which was followed by a piano concert during which two pieces from Soler Casabón's *L'hiver sur les champs* and *Crépuscles* were performed.

The renowned French musicologist Damien Top has also shown a great interest in Soler Casabón and as a result several of his compositions have been performed in different concerts in France and Belgium. Top is also the author of an extensive study about the musician which was published in a collection dedicated to Apollinaire. This renowned personality believes that *Le musicien de Saint-Merry* occupies a place in the list of mythical works to be rescued. Moreover, he concludes that the magnitude of the work of this Aragonese musician, who said in one of his letters to Picasso "the essential never ages in art, and is therefore eternal" must be preserved

On the other hand, although Gerhard and Casabón had very different personalities, there are two things they had in common: they lived for a few years in the Catalan capital, Barcelona, and because of the war, they were profusely forgotten. Being able to escape the war was the key to Gerhard's worldwide recognition. Not so lucky was Soler, who died in misery and failed to see his ballet premiered. Therefore, recovering his life and preserving his works is of the utmost importance not only for the Spanish heritage and for the history of music in general, but it is an opportunity to dignify the figure of a great composer of whom there is hardly anything written.

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