

THE UNKNOWN
PALAU DE LA
MÚSICA CATALANA



Joaquim Borràs and Marta Grassot

THE UNKNOWN PALAU DE LA MÚSICA CATALANA



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Acronyms:
AFB Arxiu Fotogràfic de Barcelona
(Barcelona Photographic Archive)
ANC Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya
(National Archive of Catalonia)
CEDOC Centre de Documentació de l'Orfeó Català
(Documentation Centre of the Orfeó Català)

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Foreword

ARCHITECTURE AND MUSIC: SPACE AND TIME

Lluís Domènech Girbau, Doctorate of Architecture

A this «historic» book on the Palau evocatively takes me back to those founding moments, so vital for our culture, and in particular to the considerations that Lluís Domènech i Montaner had to make on that blank sheet of paper he had at his desk in 1905, charged with designing a large concert hall. I also remember, with regard to this active attitude of the architect, in 1995, when I taught a course on Domènech i Montaner at the School of Architecture, which in practice consisted of visiting the Palau with the students and having them interpret the work. It was another way of «seeing» the Palau, through their questions and interpretations. It was quite common for the students to inquire in depth about

«the reason for everything», meaning, what Domènech intended, apart from delivering a concert hall and services for the Orfeó. And between the students and I there was swift agreement: Domènech wanted to make «architecture» that went beyond the mere assignment; he wanted to transcend the functional problem, and with the spatial and ornamental resources he tried to create a suggestive atmosphere with the main, or indeed only, objective of the project being listening to music.

Domènech, recalling the old lessons of his teacher Llorens i Barba, relied on the power of psychology and its relations with «perception», and tried to achieve a seemingly simple goal: that the audience listening at the Palau would be immersed in the illusory world in which the architectural form was identified with the musical form.

However, I also believed that Hermann von Helmholtz (1821-94), the wise man who connected the world of the sciences - of optics and acoustics - to the philosophy of perception, may have influenced him, since Domènech had bought his books, in the French version, in Paris in 1867. The relationship «visual environment-musical perception» was Domènech's priority, in my view. The realisation of the first part of this relationship was the Palau, which suggested the atmosphere «of a forest in the twilight», as some critics have indicated. It was a plausible poetic reality in the context of Romanticism, the most suitable to be identified.

The second part sought a more direct relationship with musical perception based on a principle common to architecture and music: the «space-time» relationship, through the creation of «partitions», elements that are crossed, forming part of a stage (the space) with which the spatial dynamism (the time) is created, the movement that we make when we are in the Palau, a quality shared with music.

ENRIC CASTELLÀ / CEDOC - PALAU DE LA MÚSICA CATALANA PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION



Introduction

THE ORFEÓ CATALÀ AND THE HOUSE OF SONGS

Joaquim Borràs and Marta Grassot

EThe Palau de la Música Catalana is undoubtedly one of the most emblematic concert halls in our country. Its century-old history has had the cultural, political and social history written on its stones since 1908, and the Orfeó Català (Catalan Choral Society), as the architect of the Palau, is its highest representation. In other words, the Palau is not only living history, but also one of the greatest exponents of the Art Nouveau architecture of Lluís Domènech i Montaner, who knew how to successfully meet the needs the Orfeó had for his new quarters. Thus, a majestic building

was created in which Domènech i Montaner made his architectural genius shine through, modelling a building in which the various arts of the time merged - stained glass, mosaics and carved stone - making the Palau one of the Art Nouveau jewels that this book aims to rediscover.

Inside this musical box, the history of Catalan music has been resonating for more than a hundred years: the performers, conductors and great premieres, without forgetting the many other cultural and political events that would unfold in the concert hall. All this we were able to bring together through the photographic heritage, which we have selected to show images of unseen spaces, those that have disappeared and some striking episodes from



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FESTIVAL OF INAUGURATION

On the previous page, general view of the Concert Hall - the name «Palau de la Música Catalana» does not appear yet - on the day of the Feast of Blessing and premiere, on 9 February, 1908. The feast consisted of a blessing by Cardinal Casañas, the official opening and the concert by the Orfeó Català, accompanied by the new organ.

ASSEMBLY OF MEMBERS

Felix Millet i Maristany, president of the Orfeó Català Association, spoke at a time when the members' meeting was reviewing both the activities of the Orfeó Català and the Association. Fèlix Millet was president between 1951 and 1967, at a time of artistic momentum at the Palau de la Música and with a register of around 3,000 members in the organisation.



XAVIER BRANGULÍ / CEDOC - LLUÍS MILLET I PAGÈS AND LLUÍS M. MILLET I MILLET Collection

those years. In total there are about 167 photographs by such renowned artists as Frederic Ballell, Josep and Xavier Brangulí, Josep M. Sagarra, Josep Postius, Pau Audouard Deglaire, Carlos Pérez de Rozas, etc. To make this selection we have consulted the photographic collections, principally the Orfeó Català Documentation Centre, the Photographic Archive of Barcelona, the National Archive of Catalonia and the Alicia de Larrocha Archive.

The volume, divided into four chapters, chronologically reviews four historically distinct stages. The first, between 1891 and 1911, focuses on the foundation of the Orfeó Català and the construction of the Palau de la Música Catalana with its first concerts of symphonic music and Catalan folk song. The creation of the *Revista Musical Catalana* and the celebration of the Festival of Catalan Music also relate to this period. The second is that framed between the years 1912 and 1936, of musical

consolidation, when the Palau became one of the most significant concert halls, where the innovative currents of the time came together, all showing the creative level of the Catalan composers of that epoch.

The book follows with a third stage marked by the end of the Civil War and the post-war period, from 1939 to 1957, when the Palau was a witness and victim of the action by Nazi groups and Falangist associations. Despite the musical impoverishment of these years, at the end of the 1940s the first green shoots arose with the reappearance of the Orfeó Català, the creation of the Barcelona Municipal Orchestra and the debuts of new performers.

Finally, the last stage between 1958 and 1975 that would be driven by the resurgence of new musical organisations that established the concert hall as a point of reference for the great national and international artists.



UNKNOWN AUTHORSHIP / CEDOC - LLUIS MILLET / PAGES I LLUIS M. MILLET / MILLET Collection

ORIGIN AND CONSTRUCTION (1891-1911)

From Dream to Reality

The period from 1891 to 1903 represents the decisive years for the foundation of the Orfeó Català and for its first artistic steps. The Orfeó Català was founded on 6 September, 1891 by Lluís Millet and Amadeu Vives in response to the admiration felt for the international choirs that had taken part in the Universal Exposition of Barcelona in 1888, with the aim of overcoming the decline in the Claverian choirs and in the midst of the resurgence of political and cultural Catalanism.

Initially, the Orfeó Català began with only a male section, but the visit of the Russian National Capella in 1895, with mixed voices, opened eyes towards enlargement with sections for children (1895) and «ladies» (1896).

In 1897, the Orpheus, represented by the men's section, performed for the first time at the Nice International Competition, winning first Prize for Sight Reading and other special commendations. As for its external projection, four years later (1901) the artistic excursion to Montpellier, Marseille and Perpignan would take place, a sign of its maturity, achieved by expanding its range of activity.

This vocation for the internationalisation of the musical project is combined with a characteristic that has always defined the organisation's pathway, which is its presence and deep-rootedness within the Catalan territory, performing the

TOWARD THE GREAT REPERTOIRES

On the previous page, portrait of the Orfeó Català at the Teatre Líric on the occasion of the extraordinary concert of religious choral music on 4 April, 1897. On this occasion, they performed polyphonic works, a path that was consistent with the thought of Louis Millet on the restoration of musical heritage.

PRESENCE IN THE TERRITORY

A group of singers march towards the monastery in the village of L'Espluga de Francolí to deliver a new flag to the Catalan Union in 1903. They premiered «La nostra bandera» (Our Flag), by Lluís Millet, based on a poem by Joan Maragall. On page 17, the men's section of the Orfeó Català parades through the streets of Terrassa in 1896.



UNKNOWN AUTHORSHIP / CEDOC - ORFEÓ CATALÀ PHOTOGRAPHIC collection

traditional and popular Catalan repertoire.

An extra-musical event took place in 1900, when false allegations were made against the Orfeó to the tax authorities for an alleged fraud by the organisation which led to the seizing of the flag, a bungled attempt that further reinforced the organisation's patriotic standing.

The artistic prestige and musical quality of the Orfeó reached a high point on 30 March, 1900, when it performed for the first time at the Gran Teatre del Liceu with a performance of Beethoven's *Ninth* Symphony. It was the first time that the work had been performed in its entirety in Barcelona. Similarly, this international connection would be strengthened with the collaboration of Richard Strauss in the concert of 6 March, 1901 with the performance of the sixteen-voice motet *Der Abend* (*The Evening*), conducted by Richard Strauss himself.

1904 became one of the major milestones for the

Orfeó Català, including the acquisition of land for the future Palau de la Música Catalana, the foundation of the *Revista Musical Catalana* magazine and the creation of the Festival of Catalan Music. It was Joaquim Cabot i Rovira, president of the Orfeó Català from 1902, who took on the challenge of building the organisation's own headquarters. The commission was given to Lluís Domènech i Montaner, one of the most important architects of the time and one of the main protagonists of Catalan modernisme.

On 10 April, 1905, the building works began and, with great ceremony, on 23 April that same year, the day of St. George and the Easter day of Resurrection, the first stone was laid. To meet the cost of its construction, six thousand bonds of one hundred pesetas each were issued - in amounts of 100 and 500 pesetas - which were paid for by popular subscription among the directors