

# *Viva, viva la Tirana:* Clarifying an Elusive Spanish Dance Song

AURÈLIA PESSARRODONA

**T**he late eighteenth century witnessed an increased permeability between elite and popular culture as upper-class entertainments took inspiration from vernacular cultural manifestations. We find excellent examples in Spanish music and dance, with the rise of many popular genres such as fandangos and seguidillas that crossed social boundaries and became widely popular in theaters and even salons as one-off songs. In fact, some of these genres, which were highly stylized, constitute the basis of classical Spanish dance—much later termed the “Bolero School”—that also became the typical and topical musical image of Spain abroad, as we can see in the famous fandangos inserted in scenic works by Gluck and Mozart, or the seguidillas in Giovanni Paisiello’s and Vicente Martín y Soler’s operas, to mention only a few eighteenth-century theatrical examples.

The eighteenth-century fandango has already received notable attention from scholars,<sup>1</sup> and now seguidillas are gaining increased

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Judith Etzion, “The Spanish Fandango: From Eighteenth-Century ‘Lasciviousness’ to Nineteenth-Century Exoticism,” *Anuario Musical* 48 (1993): 229–50;

recognition as well.<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding these efforts, an important oversight remains: the *tirana*, a dance song that became popular during the last third of the century onward, even inspiring foreign composers such as Luigi Boccherini, Ludwig van Beethoven, and Saverio Mercadante. There has yet to be a substantial study of the musical characteristics of the *tirana*.<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, it has been thought that the *tirana* was, in reality, a general name for Andalusian songs, without clear typologies or concrete identifying musical characteristics. For example, the flamenco specialist Arcadio Larrea affirmed: “When I think of that multitude of songs called *tiranas*, so very musically diverse, there is no end to the difficulty I find in understanding the *tirana* as an independent and

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Peter Manuel, “From Scarlatti to ‘Guantanamera’: Dual Tonicity in Spanish and Latin American Music,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 55 (2002): 311–36; Pompeyo Juan Pérez Díaz, “Los fandangos de Boccherini y de Dionisio Aguado: ¿Dos propuestas a partir de una fuente de inspiración común?,” in *Luigi Boccherini: Estudios sobre fuentes, recepción e historiografía*, ed. Marco Mangani, Elisabeth Le Guin, and Jaime Tortella (Madrid: Comunidad de Madrid, 2006), 135–42; Norberto Torres, “La evolución de los toques flamencos: Desde el fandango dieciochesco ‘por medio,’ hasta los toques mineros del siglo XX,” *Revista de Investigación sobre Flamenco “La madrugá”* 2 (2010): 1–87; K. Meira Goldberg and Antoni Pizà, eds., *The Global Reach of the Fandango in Music, Song and Dance: Spaniards, Indians, Africans and Gypsies* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2016); and Ana Lombardía, “From Lavapiés to Stockholm: Eighteenth-Century Violin Fandangos and the Shaping of Musical ‘Spanishness,’” *Eighteenth-Century Music* 17 (2020): 177–99.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Adela Presas, “Aproximación a la forma literario-musical de las seguidillas en la tonadilla escénica,” in *Teatro y música en España: Los géneros breves en la segunda mitad del siglo XVIII*, ed. Joaquín Álvarez Barrientos and Begoña Lolo (Madrid: Universidad Autónoma de Madrid–CSIC, 2008), 149–64; Elisabeth Le Guin, *The Tonadilla in Performance: Lyric Comedy in Enlightenment Spain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 108–28; Aurèlia Pessarrodona, “Il ritorno di Figaro in patria: Some Comments on the Reception of Paisiello’s *Il barbiere di Siviglia* in Madrid,” *Rivista Italiana di Musicologia* 56 (2021): 95–142, at 129–36; and Elvira Carrión, “La danza en España en la segunda mitad del siglo XVIII: *El bolero*” (PhD diss., Universidad de Murcia, 2017). For a more general overview, see *Una mirada al patrimonio cultural inmaterial. La seguidilla: Expresión de una cultura* (Ciudad Real: CIOFF, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> The only articles specifically on the *tirana* are José Subirá, “La *tirana* poético-musical,” *Segismundo* 3 (1967): 161–78; José Antonio Morales, “La *Tirana del trípili* en el repertorio tonadillesco,” *Música de Andalucía en la Red* (2017, unpublished); and Sara Navarro, “Tiranas y polacas en la tonadilla escénica: Poesía, música y baile en los escenarios teatrales de la corte madrileña,” *Revista de Humanidades* 41 (2020): 37–60. There are no systematic analyses of the musical characteristics of the *tirana* besides some entries in specialized dictionaries, such as Antonio Fargas y Soler, *Diccionario de la música* (Barcelona: Imprenta de Joaquín Verdaguer, 1852), 207; Carlos José Melcior, *Diccionario enciclopédico de la música* (Lérida: Imp. Barcelonsa de Alejandro García, 1859), 416; Felipe Pedrell, *Diccionario técnico de la música*, 2nd ed. (Barcelona: Isidro Torres Oriol, 1894), 457; Luisa Lacál, *Diccionario de la música: Técnico, histórico, bio-bibliográfico*, 3rd ed. (Madrid: Est. tip. de San Francisco de Sales, 1900), 538; Jaime Pahissa, dir., *Diccionario de la música ilustrado* (Barcelona: Central Catalana de Publicaciones, ca. 1929), 1146; Joaquín Pena and Higinio Anglés, *Diccionario de la música Labor* (Barcelona: Labor, 1954), 2:2121; and, more recently, Mariano Pérez Gutiérrez, “*Tirana*,” in *Diccionario de la música española e hispanoamericana*, dir. Emilio Casares (Madrid: Sociedad General de Autores y Editores, 1999–2002), 10:304–5. On this topic, see Navarro, “Tiranas y polacas,” 45–46.

unique form.”<sup>4</sup> Following this line, Celsa Alonso, in her study on nineteenth-century Spanish art song, contended that the *tirana* “simply would make reference to a song that sets a quatrain to music.”<sup>5</sup> In his investigations of the *jaleo* dances,<sup>6</sup> Miguel Ángel Berlanga similarly considers the *tirana* to be the general name of songs made for dancing *jaleos*.<sup>7</sup>

These assertions are not based on systematic analyses of eighteenth-century *tiranas*, and they ignore the rich contemporary sources available, above all those from the old public theaters of Madrid, now held in the Biblioteca Histórica Municipal de Madrid (hereafter E-Mm). The objective of this article is to examine and analyze the eighteenth-century *tirana* in order to determine its main characteristics, which would allow us to define it and study its likely impact abroad. Although this article deals primarily with *tiranas* in the context of Madrid’s theaters, the influential and representative testimonies discussed here may also shed light on the main characteristics of the dance song more broadly. Given the sizable number of pieces held in the E-Mm, this research has focused on repertoire of the 1770s and 1780s, a period of development and consolidation of the *tirana* in the Madrilenian context.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, the majority of the works discussed here were composed by Pablo Esteve (ca. 1730–94) or Blas de Laserna (1751–1816), official composers of the two theatrical companies of Madrid in 1778 and 1779 respectively,<sup>9</sup> or by other related

<sup>4</sup> See Arcadio Larrea, *El flamenco en su raíz* (1974; repr. Seville: Signatura Ediciones, 2004), 120; quoted in Celsa Alonso, *La canción lírica española en el siglo XIX* (Madrid: Instituto Complutense de Ciencias Musicales, 1998), 65.

<sup>5</sup> See Alonso, *La canción lírica española*, 65.

<sup>6</sup> *Jaleo* is a generic name for Andalusian dances typically performed solo and accompanied by hand-clapping; *jaleo* dances, according to Berlanga, are the direct antecedents of flamenco dances. See Miguel Ángel Berlanga, “Los bailes de jaleo, precedentes directos de los bailes flamencos,” *Anuario Musical* 71 (2016): 179–95, at 180–81.

<sup>7</sup> See Berlanga, “Los bailes de jaleo,” 191.

<sup>8</sup> The period with the greatest presence of *tiranas* in tonadillas was the 1780s. See Navarro, “Tiranas y polacas,” 42.

<sup>9</sup> See José Subirá, *La tonadilla escénica* (Madrid: Tipografía de Archivos, 1928–30), 1:171–72. Accurate and up-to-date monographs on these relevant and prolific composers are lacking. On Pablo Esteve, see, for instance, Juan Pablo Fernández, *El mecenazgo musical de las Casas de Osuna y Benavente (1733–1844): Un estudio sobre el papel de la música en la alta nobleza española* (PhD diss., Universidad de Granada, 2005), 1:207–13, 450–68. On Blas de Laserna, see the classic essay by Julio Gómez, “Don Blas de Laserna: Un capítulo de la historia del teatro lírico español visto en la vida del último tonadillero” [1925–26], in *Escritos de Julio Gómez: Recopilación y comentarios*, ed. Antonio Iglesias (Madrid: Alpuerto, 1986), 71–165; or, more recently, Andrés Gámez, “Blas de Laserna (1751–1816), una biografía marcada por el teatro,” *Quodlibet: Revista de Especialización Musical* 70 (2019): 140–65.

musicians, such as Antonio Rosales (1740–1801)<sup>10</sup> and Jacinto Valledor (1744–1809).<sup>11</sup>

*Historical and Contextual Background: The Tirana as a sonsonete popular*

In the popular culture of late eighteenth-century Spain, the word *tirana* was polysemic. Its primary meaning was “female tyrant,” used both as a noun and an adjective, but it referred also to both an actress and a dance song. The actress María del Rosario Fernández (1755–1803) was known as *La Tirana* because she was the wife of the actor Francisco Castellanos (*El Tirano*), who specialized in playing tyrants. Rosario Fernández was one of the most celebrated performers on Spanish stages during this period; however, although her name has been cause for confusion, she had no relationship with the *tirana* as a dance song; she specialized in tragic roles and sang only occasionally.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, the dance song known as the *tirana* became very popular. The name was derived from expressions common to the refrains, such as “ay, tirana,” or from the typical reproaches addressed to a hypothetical unrequited female lover whose indifferent behavior resembles a “female tyrant”;<sup>13</sup> eventually *tirana* became a catchword for the genre. The most extensive contemporary description is by Juan Antonio de Iza Zamácola, writing under the alias “Don Preciso” in the prologue to the first volume of his *Colección de las mejores coplas de seguidillas, tiranas y polos que se han compuesto para cantar a la guitarra* (Collection of the best stanzas of seguidillas, tiranas, and polos composed to sing with the guitar, 1799). The intention of this work was to differentiate real and authentic Spanish songs from the “invasion” of foreign culture, above all Italian opera. Among the Spanish repertoire Iza Zamácola includes the *tirana*, which he explains as follows:

<sup>10</sup> Rosales collaborated often with the theaters of Madrid. See Begoña Lolo and Germán Labrador, *La música en los teatros de Madrid, I: Antonio Rosales y la tonadilla escénica* (Madrid: Alpuerto, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Valledor was *músico* (a kind of composer’s assistant) to the theatrical companies of Madrid upon his return from Barcelona in 1785. See Pessarrodona, *Jacinto Valledor y la tonadilla*, chaps. 6 and 7.

<sup>12</sup> See Subirá, *La tonadilla escénica*, 2:268; and Subirá, “La tirana poético-musical,” 176–77.

<sup>13</sup> Exceptionally a *tirano* (male tyrant) is mentioned, normally in *tiranas* with a dialogue between a man and a woman, as, for instance, in *La peregrina y el payo* by Rosales (1783), *Aviso a los forasteros y mal uso del idioma* by Esteve (1784), and in the different versions of the last *tirana* from *Los majos de rumbo* by Valledor (1790–93). On this tonadilla see Aurèlia Pessarrodona, *Jacinto Valledor (1744–1809): Tonadillas*, vol. 2, *Obras a partir de 1785* (Madrid: CSIC, forthcoming).