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Folk songs in the organ music of Basque composers

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Abstract. The organ culture of the Basque Country and Navarre developed under the influence of European trends, primarily associated with the emergence of Romantic organs and, secondly, with a reassessment of the role of music in Catholic worship. Basque composers who studied in France, Germany, and Belgium played a significant role in disseminating these ideas. Equally important was the strong national character of Basque music, often referred to as *nacionalismo musical*.

The acutely perceived national distinctiveness of Basque music, known as musical nationalism, was also of great importance. Folk songs were closely linked to the colour local of Basque organ music; in several works, thematic material was drawn from collections compiled by musicologists Resurrección María de Azkue and José Antonio de Donostia. Padre Donostia was also an organist and composer who incorporated folk material into his organ works. Composer-organist Jesús Guridi similarly drew upon folk sources. This article analyzes organ compositions that incorporate folk songs and identifies principles for their adaptation to professional music genres.

Keywords: organ, organ repertoire, Romantic organ, folk songs, Renaissance, Spain, Basque Country, Navarre

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Из истории национальных композиторских школ

Научная статья

Народные песни в органном творчестве баскских композиторов

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Аннотация. Органная культура Страны Басков и Наварры сложилась под воздействием европейских тенденций, связанных, во-первых, с появлением органов романтического типа и, во-вторых, с пересмотром места музыки в католическом богослужении. Большую роль в распространении этих идей сыграли баскские композиторы, обучавшиеся во Франции, Германии и Бельгии. Важное значение имела также остро осознанная национальная характерность музыки басков, так называемый *nacionalismo musical*. Стремление утвердить национальную идентичность проявилось в работе по восстановлению баскского музыкального наследия. Она началась в первой половине XIX века с систематического сбора народных песен. Именно с песнями связан «местный колорит» баскского органного искусства: в ряде произведений тематический материал был взят из сборников, которые составили музыковеды

Ресуррексьон Мария де Аскуэ и Хосе Антонио де Доностия. Падре Доностия был также органистом и композитором, использовавшим песенный материал в произведениях для органа. Опирался на фольклорные источники и композитор-органист Хесус Гуриди. Статья посвящена анализу органных сочинений, в которых использованы народные песни, выявлению принципов их адаптации к жанрам профессиональной музыки.

Ключевые слова: орган, органный репертуар, романтический орган, народные песни, Ренасимьенто, Испания, Страна Басков и Наварра

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Introduction

Basque organ music from the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century developed under the influence of two very different pan-European trends. The first, known as the Liturgical Movement, spread across France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, and other European countries in the 1830s, aiming to return to the roots of the Christian experience. In the musical sphere, this involved efforts to revive the traditions of Gregorian chant and Renaissance polyphony. The second trend was associated with the emergence of organs designed to reflect the musical ideals of the Romantic era. The main centers of this development were in France and Germany. In Spain, these new trends in foreign organ building were particularly embraced in regions bordering France, especially the Basque Country and Navarre (*Illustration 1*), whose populations were predominantly Basque. In 1854, the first Romantic organ in Spain, built by the firm Aristide Cavaillé-Coll, was installed in the church of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción in Lekeitio (Biscay). Over time, even the surviving Spanish Baroque organs in Basque territories were “Romanticized” by local craftsmen [1, p. 179].

Equally significant was a third, purely local factor: the awareness of national identity, reinforced by the uniqueness of the Basque language. Sociologist Daniele Conversi described it as a “primordial element and a still-living proof of the survival of Europe’s most ancient people” [2, p. 182]. This language has no Indo-European roots; its origins are as mythical and mysterious as those of its speakers. The idea of a Basque nation with a distinct cultural identity, separate from other Spanish provinces and regions, took shape in the late 19th century during the period known as the musical New Renaissance.¹

¹ As Irina Alekseyevna Kryazheva writes, “The turn of the 19th and 20th centuries marked an important boundary in the history of Spanish music. In contemporary art studies, this period is commonly referred to as the New Renaissance, which signaled a time of intensive aesthetic exploration, culminating in the 20th century in the highest artistic achievements across a wide range of art forms, including literature, poetry, drama, painting, and music” [3, p. 151].



Illustration 1. Basque Territories in Spain¹

¹ Disposición transitoria cuarta https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disposici%C3%B3n_transitoria_cuarta

The leading figures of Basque musical culture, composers, performers, musicologists, journal editors, and critics, actively supported the restoration and documentation of Basque heritage. One manifestation of this national revival in music was the development of Basque musical theater at the turn of the 19th to 20th centuries [4, p. 511].

Subsequent generations of Basque composers critically evaluated the contributions of each figure from the musical *New Renaissance* period. For instance, Padre Nemesio Otaño believed that, for José María Usandizaga, folk music was a pretext rather than an objective, making him not entirely national, but primarily a theatrical musician: “Usandizaga no era precisamente un músico nacionalista; para él el folk-lore era un pretexto, no un fin. Él se descubría, ante todo, como músico de teatro” [5, p. 36].

Basque Folk Songs

Between 1826 and 1946, the principal collections of Basque folk songs and dances were published for the first time [6]. These orally transmitted songs, passed down from generation to generation, form the foundation of Basque musical folklore. Lullabies and choral songs, which are widely disseminated across the Basque regions, play an especially significant role [7, pp. 70–73]. Folk song fulfilled a reintegrative function aligned with Herder’s original concepts of the “natural people” (*Naturvolk*)² and the “national spirit” (*Volksgeist*). The natural people inhabit rural areas where, unlike in cities, their essence and collective spirituality, expressed through folk art, remain uncorrupted. The compilers of the earliest collections attempted to establish criteria distinguishing what possessed genuine ethnic value and could be considered authentically Basque,³ from what could not; these efforts clearly reflected the principles of *nacionalismo musical*.

The first collection of traditional songs from the Basque Country was *Gipuzcoako dantza gogoangarrien kondaira edo historia* by Juan Ignacio de Iztueta, published in 1826. In keeping with the stylistic tendencies of the time, many collections consisted of harmonized melodies arranged for piano,

² The concept of the natural people as a pre-industrial ethnic society was introduced in 1774 by the German historian Johann Gottfried Herder.

³ However, some researchers believe that a consensus has still not been reached regarding the meaning of the term “Basque culture” [8, p. 56].

or for voice with piano accompaniment, and were intended for bourgeois salons. Of particular note is José Antonio Santesteban's periodical *Colección de Aires Vascongados* (from 1862 onward). Several nearly simultaneous French publications also deserve attention: *14 airs basques, les plus populaires* by Pascal Lamazou (1869); *Souvenir des Pyrénées* by Madame de la Villéhélio (1869); and *Chants populaires du Pays Basque* by Jean Dominique Julien Sallaberry (1870), which Basque composers valued greatly.

The initiative to preserve national heritage was undertaken not only by enthusiastic musicians but also by official institutions. The French scholar Charles Bordes published the *Archives de la tradition basque*, the first volume of which appeared in 1891. In 1912, the regional government organized a competition for the best collection of Basque melodies. First prize was awarded to Resurrección María de Azkue for his *Cancionero popular vasco* (1921–1924), and second prize to Padre José Antonio de Donostia for *Euskel eres-sorta* (1921). The collections compiled by Bordes, Azkue, and Donostia are distinguished by their systematic approach to the musical material.

Basque musicologists developed various theories about the origins of their region's music, drawing on the work of scholars from other countries while proposing their own ideas. Without attempting to assess the scholarly validity of these theories, we may simply list their principal claims. Azkue adhered to a Basque-Greek theory [9, pp. 27–53]; Francisco Gascue supported a Basque-Celtic one [10, pp. 42–65]; and Padre Donostia approached the question from the perspective of cultural interpenetration, equating ethnic affiliation with cultural identity [11, p. 166]. Charles Bordes, in turn, linked Basque singing to Gregorian chant, basing his view on modal and intonational similarities between Basque and Gregorian monody [12, p. 244]. Finally, the most recent scholar working in this line of inquiry, José Antonio Arana Martija, synthesized all of these ideas, arguing that Basque music was shaped by Celtic and ancient Greek traditions, as well as by the modal system of Gregorian chant [12, p. 244].

Attempts at classification are equally interesting. For Bordes, differences among songs were determined by the themes of their texts. In the sample presentation of his collection, he identified heroic, love, satirical, moral songs, and hymns [13, p. 3]. Azkue divided music into sacred and secular, and further subdivided secular music into songs and dances [14, p. 6]. Notably, the boundary between secular and sacred

folk music was fluid; a change of text often resulted in the creation of a new religious song.

This refers to the principle of *contrafactum*, which may involve elevating or lowering the character of the original through the new text. The mechanisms for creating a new spiritual song varied. As the German composer Johann Friedrich Reichardt (1752–1814) observed: “The first hymns of the Christian Church were probably folk hymns: either one gave spiritual words to well-known folk melodies, as was still the case in various separatist Christian congregations, such as the Moravian Brethren, or one invented new melodies with a folk sensibility for the spiritual” (as cited in [15, p. 49]). In the period under discussion, the Mass in Spain was conducted in Latin, so sacred singing in the Basque language served an educational function and was performed in contexts where use of the vernacular was possible, that is, it functioned as paraliturgical music. Spanish music journals that promoted liturgical reform devoted extensive attention to spiritual songs written in Spanish [16, p. 201].

The most consistent findings concern the characteristics of the Basque vocal style. According to Guridi [17, p. 11], Basque folk songs, both solo and choral, are marked by syllabic writing.⁴ Bordes, Azkue, and Arana Martija agree with this assessment [12, p. 281], also noting a tendency toward narrow melodic motion, primarily by seconds, with only occasional leaps of a fourth or fifth. Donostia and Francisco de Madina add to these features the absence of chromaticism and a restrained approach to ornamentation [19].

Another persistent trait of the Basque vocal style is its rhythmic flexibility, including asymmetric phrases and, consequently, the lack of a regular meter. This explains the unusual notation modeled on Gregorian chant in Bordes’s collection: four-line staves and square neumes without stems. For the song *The Eagles Soar High in the Sky* (*Arranoak bortietan*), Bordes provides two different notated versions along with notable commentary (*Illustration 2*).

“This melody,” writes Bordes, “is one of the oldest that has come down to us through tradition, and at the same time one of the most beautiful in Basque music. We have found that Gregorian neumatic notation is the most suitable for transcribing it and preserving its rhythmic freedom” (“Ce thème est on des plus anciens que nous ait transmis la tradition, et en même temps un des plus beaux de la musique basque. Nous n’avons trouvé que la notation neumatique grégorienne pour le transcrire et en conserver la liberté rythmique”) [13, p. 10]. Further, regarding the second version of the notation: “We even presume that many

⁴ For the role of syllabic structure in the prosody of Basque songs [18, pp. 158, 167].

ARRANOAK BORTIETAN

(Dialecte souletin.)

A -Rra-no- ak borti- e- tan go-ra-da-bil- tza he-ga-le- tan; Ni- e-re
le- hen ande-re- ki e-bilten khan be-re- tan o-rai aldiz,
ardu-ra ardu- ra ni-garra di- zut be-gi- e- tan.

Pas lent. (Battez à la croche, librement) 112 = 

4

Ar-ra-no- ak borti- e- tan go-ra-da-bil- tza he-ga-le-
- tan; Ni- e- re le- hen an- de- re- ki e- bil- ten khan be- re
tan; O- ra- i al- diz, ar- du- ra ar- du- ra
ni- gar- ra di- zut be- gi- e- tan.

2 Hartzen dit hartzen ofizioa Iratiat ulhañ benoa;
Noula beitut bizioa oihanetan khantatzekoa,
Abis hounik emaitetz eta egia erraitetz banaoa.

Illustration 2. Bordes C. Arranoak bortietan from *Cent chansons populaires basques*⁵

⁵ Bordes, C. (189?). *Cent chansons populaires basques* [13, p. 10]

of the neumatic groups were broken apart in order to fit the juxtaposition of the sung text's syllables, which is without question much more modern than the melody itself. The beamed eighth notes are nothing other than a modern-notation transcription of the *pressi* so characteristic of Gregorian chant. They should be given a slight emphasis, as if they carried the entire rhythmic weight of the melodic phrase. The melody belongs to the first Gregorian mode. We possess a great number of versions of this admirable theme" ("Nous presumons même que bien des groupes neumatiques ont été démembrés pour la juxtaposition des syllabes du texte chanté qui est sans contredit beaucoup plus moderne que le chant. Les croches semblables liées ensemble ne sont autres que la transcription en notation moderne des *pressi*⁶ si caractéristiques de la musique grégorienne. Elles doivent être légèrement renforcées, comme si elles recevaient tout le poids rythmique de la période mélodique. La mélodie appartient au premier mode grégorien. Nous possédons un grand nombre de versions de cet admirable theme") [13, p. 10].

Basque melodies are marked by their simplicity and intensity, with a gentle and tranquil expressiveness. Numerous melodies or individual phrases can be sung as a canon, though it is also common to harmonize each note, with tonal harmony freely coexisting alongside modality.

Folk Material in Organ Compositions

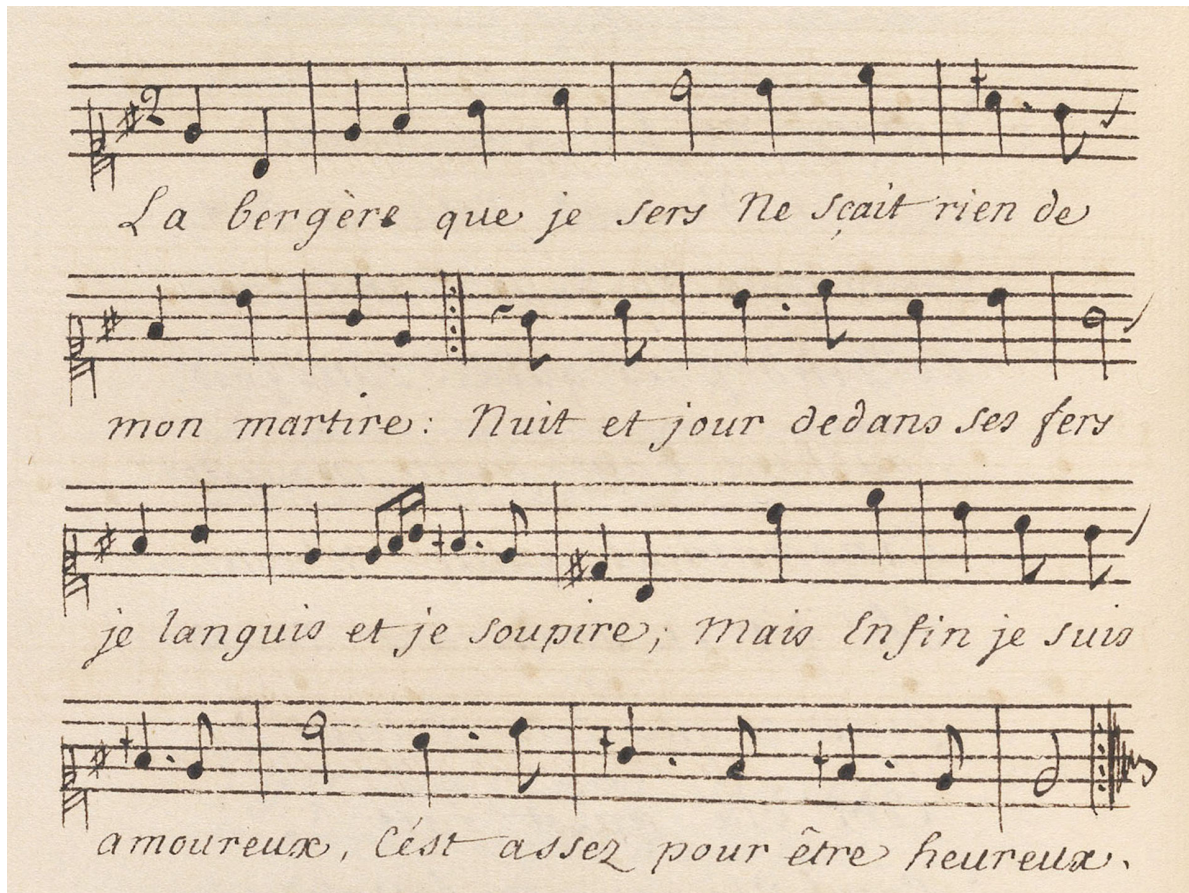
For a group of composers representing the organ school of the Basque Country and Navarre,⁷ examples of folk (and in some cases popular) music served as sources of musical material for their organ works.

Let us turn to several examples. The first is *O, Crucified Jesus* (*O Yesus Gurutzera*, 1912) by the Capuchin monk Padre Donostia. The origin of the melody underlying this organ piece is particularly revealing. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, missionaries often adapted sacred texts to the tunes of romances. They also drew on melodies from operas, and even from lighter comic genres: as Donostia explains, the hymn *O, Crucified Jesus* is a contrafact of the love song *The Shepherdess Whom I Serve* (*La bergère que je sers*) from a French vaudeville. With its newly added sacred text, it appeared in Simon-Joseph Pellegrin's *Spiritual Hymns* (*Cantiques spirituels*, 1811) and in Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort's *Mission Hymns* (*Cantiques des missions*).

⁶ Pressi (singular pressus, from the Latin *pressare* 'to press') is a group of three notes in which the first two remain on the same pitch, forming an overall descending motion [20].

⁷ See also on this topic [21].

Below are both versions of the song (*Illustrations 3 and 4*).



*Illustration 3. Anonymous. The Shepherdess Whom I Serve, from the collection French Songs for Solo Voice (first half of the 18th century). The Morgan Library & Museum, New York*⁸

The minor melody with its sorrowful love text was well suited to a new text, this time a sacred one (see *Illustration 4*).

In his 1936 article, Donostia presents two versions of the religious song, in 5/4 and 3/4 [22, pp. 5–6]: as Azkue notes, meter in folk music is “at time contracted, at time expanded” (“a ratos contraída, a ratos dilatada”) [14, p. 12]. Donostia

⁸ Unknown. French songs for solo voice: manuscript, first half of the 18th century. Retrieved October 22, 2025, from <http://www.themorgan.org/music/manuscript/114149>.

primarily draws on the 5/4 version but does not follow it strictly in either rhythm or melody, since he takes both versions into account.

O Je-sus ku-ru-tze-ra ni-
gatik i-gan za-re - - - na! E-ne
gasti -ga -tze - ra maiz be-hartzen zaitu
da - - - na! O-rai zu-re al-de-
ra bi -hur-tzen naiz Yainko Jauna! Ah!
or hoit zaito o - do - la E - ne-tzat
e-man du - zu - la Ah! la.

O Ye -sus Ku-ru-tze - ra
Ni- ga-tik i- gan za- re - na
E-ne gaz- ti-ga-tze - ra Maiz behart-
zen zai-tu - da - na! O-rai zu-
re al - de - ra Bi-hurtzen naiz Yain-
ko o - na! Ah! or - hoit zaito
O-do - la E - ne-tzat e- man
du - zu - la.

Illustration 4. Religious song *O Yesus Gurutzera*⁹

The next stage of reinterpretation is the organ piece for two manuals and pedal, written in the manner of a chorale setting. The *cantus firmus* is the melody *O, Crucified Jesus*. The piece (let us call it the *F minor* chorale prelude) is written in 4/4 and cast in long note-values; there are no traces of the original 5/4 rhythm. The texture is Baroque in character: the song's melody in the right hand functions like a chorale, while the left hand and pedal form a polyphonic fabric (*Example 1*).

⁹ Donostia J. A. de. La canción religiosa *O Yesus Gurutzera* [22, pp. 5–6].

Despacio, no mucho

R.: Trompeta dulce

G.: Fondos suaves

Ped.: Fondos suaves 16,8

Example 1. Donostia J. A. de O, *Crucified Jesus*, mm. 1–10

The voices accompanying the melody imitate its initial motif. In the penultimate phrase, the *cantus firmus* forms a canon at the octave between the right hand and the pedal, while in the final phrase, a doubling at the thirteenth occurs between the outer voices (Example 2).

Donostia advocated the use of folk songs as material for academic music. In his words, “The problem is therefore this: to frame the Basque melody in such a way that in a salon, in a concert, the Basque nature, the text of the song, are highlighted, leaving us with an impression of beauty” (“le problème est donc là: encadrer lamélodie basque de telle façon que dans un salon, dans un concert, la nature basque, le texte de la chanson soient mis en relief, de manière à nous laisser une impression de beauté”) [22, p. 71]. Regarding the audience’s perception of music, he added, “It is a matter of taste, of musical culture: on the part of the composer, to succeed in creating a work of art, however brief and small it may be; on the part of the listener, to be in a state of receptivity to these ‘short waves’ that are the popular songs, so brief, so small. That is everything... to make a beautiful work of art and to be able to appreciate it, to love it. That is the question” (“C’est une affaire de goût, de culture musicale: du compositeur pour réussir à faire une oeuvre d’art, si brève, si petite soit-elle, de l’auditeur pour être en état de réceptivité de ces ‘ondes courtes’ que sont les chansons populaires si brèves, si petites. Tout est là... faire une belle oeuvre d’art et être capable de la goûter, de l’aimer. That is the question”) [22, p. 73]. The expression “short waves” refers to short-range radio waves that travel long distances.



Example 2. Donostia J. A. de. O, *Crucified Jesus*, mm. 32–43

Our next examples continue, in part, the line of “chorale treatments.” The piece *Variaciones sobre un tema religioso vasco* by Eduardo Moco-roa (1867–1959) is dedicated to the great organist of the first half of the 20th century, Miguel Echeveste (1893–1962). The work is written in the form of chorale variations, with the theme taken from the religious song *Huna, Jesus, bildots amultsua* (*Here is Jesus, the Gentle Lamb*) from the Basque-French Labourd region (*Illustration 5*).

The cycle does not begin with the theme, as is usual, but with an introduction in the form of a short improvisation on the opening motif of the song. The theme exposition is presented in the style of a harmonized chorale, with chromatized movement in the voices accompanying the melody and expressive pedal connections at cadential points (*Example 3*).

The first three variations are written in the form of chorale-style treatments on the *cantus firmus*. In Variation II, the *cantus firmus* sounds in the tenor, on the pedal played by the right foot, while the left foot plays a “dotted” bass. The harmonic figures on the manuals seem to grow out of the narrow range of the melody *Huna, Jesus, bildots amultsua* (*Example 4*).



Illustration 5. The song *Here is Jesus, the Gentle Lamb*
from: Donostia J. A. de. *Basque Songbook* (1994)¹⁰

In Variation III, the song's *cantus firmus* is again carried in the tenor, but in the oboe register; the *G minor* of this variation has a Brahms-like sound. A two-measure introduction, added to the melody (a rare feature in both chorale treatments and variations), becomes a new beginning for the *cantus firmus*, while the melody itself serves as a continuation. The dialogue of the upper voices forms a counterpoint to the *cantus firmus*. The resemblance to chorale accompaniment in German chorale preludes is particularly noticeable here. Mocoróa even inserts two-measure rests in the song to allow for interludes between the phrases of the *cantus firmus*, using the typical rhythmic formulas of Baroque chorale treatments (*Examples 5 a, b*).

The final Variation IV can be described as a harmonized chorale, sounding in a high tessitura with flowing passagework in the accompaniment. The solemnity of this variation is enhanced in the coda (*Example 6*). While Mocoróa's technique clearly reflects the influence of German chorale treatments, the overall structure of the cycle reveals traditions of the French Romantic style, especially in the combination of Variations III and IV. In the former, the airy sound of *récit en taille*¹¹ dominates for two manuals, with minimal pedal involvement, while the latter serves as the triumphant conclusion of the variation cycle.

¹⁰ Donostia J. A. de. *Cancionero Vasco*. Eusko Ikaskuntza, 1994, p. 774.

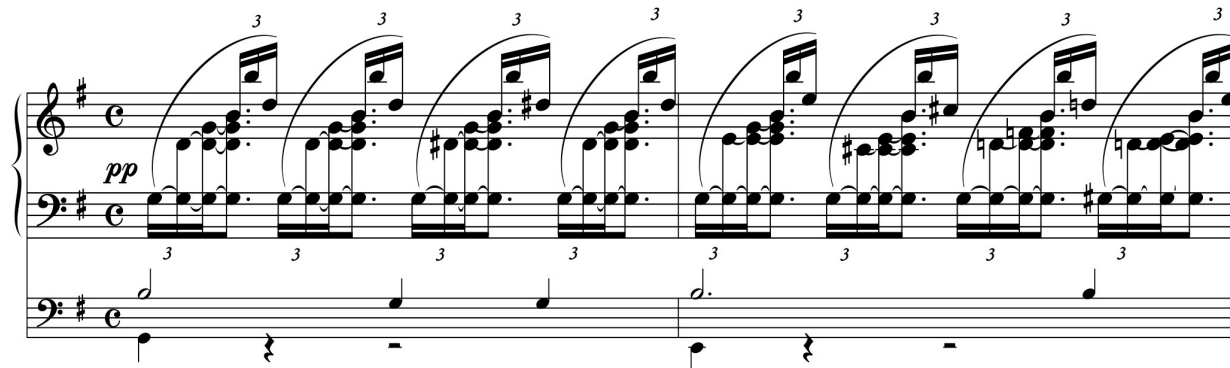
¹¹ According to the French classical organ registration, the solo part is played in the tenor.

Tema
Moderato cantabile



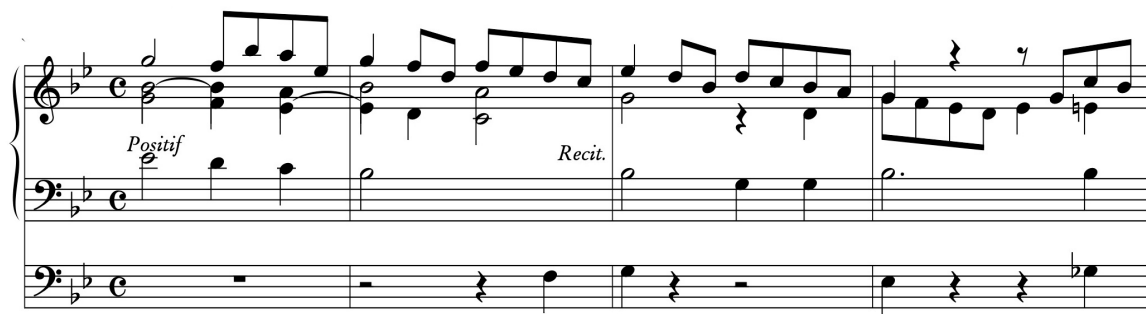
Example 3. Mocoróa E. Variations on a Basque Religious Theme. Theme

2ª variación

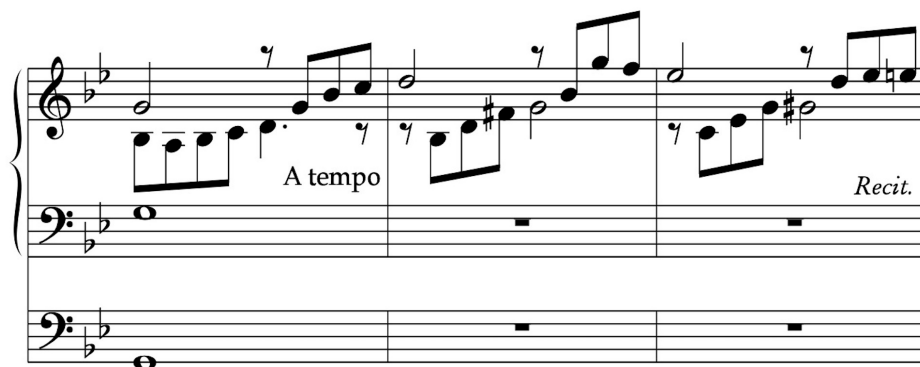


Example 4. Mocoróa E. Variations on a Basque Religious Theme.

3ª Variación



Example 5 (a). Mocoróa E. *Variations on a Basque Religious Theme*.
Beginning of Variation III, mm. 1–4



Example 5 (b). Mocoróa E. *Variations on a Basque Religious Theme*.
Beginning of Variation III, mm. 10–12

Beginning of Variation II Mocoróa preserves the characteristics of the folk song but enriches it to the fullest, exploiting the capabilities of the Romantic organ. Without resorting to imitative techniques or introducing fugues into the variation cycle, he limits himself to renewing the harmony and motives in the free voices. This approach allows the theme to be presented in a new context and gives dramatic qualities to an originally simple and schematic melody. At the same time, there remains a sense that the composer deliberately refrained from making significant changes to the theme, staying within its “boundaries.”

The same cannot be said of the next work, *Variaciones sobre un tema vasco* by Jesús Guridi (1886–1961). The lullaby *Itsasoa laino dago* (*Fog on the Sea*) has inspired many Basque composers. It is written in 3/8 time, consists of 16 measures, and has a very simple structure, both tonally and rhythmically. In Azkue's arrangement for voice and piano, a descending chromatic motion is marked in the middle of the piano texture (*Illustration 6*).



Example 6. Mocorrea E. *Variations on a Basque Religious Theme*.

Variation IV, mm. 21–26

In the Theme from Jesús Guridi's *Variations on a Basque Theme*, the same idea allows for the creation of a transparent four-voice polyphonic texture. In both the first and second sections, the bass voice presents a descending melodic line in the style of a lament. In the second section, *crescendi* and *diminuendi* are used to emphasize the dramatic character of the theme (*Example 7*).

In the nine variations following the theme, the composer alternates between almost literal repetition and the extensive use of freely developed material. For example, in Variation I, he takes only the first four notes of the original melody and then adds a new figure, which he repeats (*Example 8*).



Illustration 6. The song *Fog on the Sea* arranged
by M. d'Azkue for voice and piano, mm. 5–12¹²

Variation IV is particularly interesting, as the means of variation involve imitating the timbre of Basque folk instruments. In this case, the song melody is adapted to the rhythm of the *zortziko*, a Basque folk dance traditionally performed by a single musician on the *txistu* (a small, one-handed flute) and the *danbolin*, a small hand- or stick-played drum. Together, these form the Basque tabor-pipe instrument. Guridi imitates this combination of timbres on the organ: the melody runs in the left hand over a bourdon-like sound, simulating the *danbolin*, while the right hand imitates the *txistu* (Example 9).

¹² Azkue R. M. de. *La música popular baskongada* [14, p. 9].

Lento, non troppo

dolce



Example 7. Guridi J. *Variations on a Basque Theme*. Theme

Molto tranquillo

cantabile

mf



Example 8. Guridi J. *Variations on a Basque Theme*. Variation I, mm. 1–5



Example 9. Guridi J. *Variations on a Basque Theme*. Variation IV, mm. 1–14

In Variation V, the major-centered variation of the cycle, a substantial amount of new free material appears. Despite the change of mode, the theme's melody, played by the left hand, fully preserves its original form, although it is difficult to recognize. First, the theme's motives alternate with inserts of free material: in *Example 10*, the first two motives appear in mm. 2 and 4. Second, the *G minor* of the theme comes into conflict with the harmonization, which is especially noticeable in the treatment of the opening motive. It seems to derive from the third of the *B minor* triad, with the participation of an auxiliary *E-flat* (*Example 10*, mm. 2 and 6).

In the seventh variation, the theme is presented very freely, but the beginning of each phrase remains recognizable. In the eighth variation, written for two manuals and pedals, a canon at the fifth appears in the upper solo voices. This variation ends on the subdominant (the second-degree chord), allowing the beginning of the following variation to be heard as its resolution. The final, ninth variation is the largest in scope. The actual variation (*Andantino*) is written in 2/4, like Variation VII, to which it bears a resemblance. At the very end (*Più largamente*), repetitions of the theme's opening motive in the pedals at *fortissimo*, still in duple rhythm, finally lead to the triple-meter beginning of the coda (*Allegro*) in *G major*. Left-hand triplets imitate the sound of a carillon. The drama that has unfolded throughout the work concludes with a triumphant sonority (*Example 11*).

Andantino

riten. a tempo riten. a tempo

p II. I. *mf* II. *p* I. *mf* II. *p*

riten. Piú animato

I. *mf* II. *pp* I. *mf*

Example 10. Guridi J. *Variations on a Basque Theme*. Variation V, mm. 1–11

Guridi focused not only on the melodic elements but also added new material while preserving the harmonic foundation. In each variation, he transforms the theme without losing connection to it, and the work functions as a unified whole. As Johannes Brahms said, “In a theme with variations, for me, almost only the bass matters. But this is sacred to me; it is the solid foundation on which I then build my stories” (“bei einem Thema zu Variationen bedeutet mir eigentlich, fast, bei nahe nur der Bass etwas. Aber dieser ist mir heilig, er ist der feste Grund, auf dem ich dann meine Geschichten baue”).¹³ Something similar occurs in Guridi’s *Variations on a Basque Theme*, where the listener perceives the unity of the harmonic plan amid active melodic renewal.

¹³ Kalbeck, M. (Ed.). (1915). Brahms J. *Briefwechsel, Bd. VIII: Johannes Brahms. Briefe an Joseph Viktor Widmann, Ellen und Ferdinand Vetter, Adolf Schubring*. Deutsche Brahms-Gesellschaft, p. 217.



Example 11. Guridi J. *Variations on a Basque Theme*. Variation IX, mm. 17–31

Conclusion

In his lecture entitled *Folk Song as a Subject of Musical Composition*, delivered upon becoming a full member of the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando (1947), Guridi asserted that “folk melody by itself is an unpolished precious stone, and in any case it needs the hand of the artist to give it form” (“La melodía popular por sí solo es una piedra preciosa sin pulimentar y necesita en todo caso la mano del artista que le dé forma”) [17, p. 7]. The idea of polishing the precious stone represents one of the main approaches to understanding Basque folk creativity, alongside the collection and study of songs, theorizing their origins, and establishing spiritual songs in Spanish as a form of paraliturgical music. However, the results of song treatment deserve special attention.

The substantial body of organ music based on folk themes, created within a single generation of composers, is remarkable in itself, but the key point is this: Basque organist-composers clearly sought to extend the life of Basque folk song, opening new possibilities for its expression. Ultimately, they secured a place for it within the broader musical world.

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