

**New Tradition and Activism in Minoritized-Language
Communities: The Time of post-2008 Asturian Music /
*Nueva tradición y activismu en comunidaes de llingües mi-
norizaes: la dómina de la música asturiana
depués del 2008***

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the recovering of tradition as well as the new forms of activism and community engagement in music in Asturias following the 2008 financial crisis. Specifically, I study Rodrigo Cuevas, arguably the most recognized new musician inside and outside Asturias; Ún de Grao, the musical project of Xosé Martínez Álvarez, a member of the so-called «post-folk» generation whose main aim is to revitalize the *tonada*; and the Coru Al Altu la Lleva, which, born in the environment of the association of musicians *Caja de músicos*, continues the tradition of choral music and explicitly engages in activism, both with noted Asturian musician Nacho Vegas and as an independent ensemble.

Recent Asturian music signals new trends in its relationship to space and also to time. Musicians hope to participate globally, not by blending into any pattern, but through their local difference and through activism. Some of the issues Asturian musicians relate to are the role of the many languages and cultures that coexist in a territory, the revival of a lived past while questioning certain ideas of the previous generation, the awareness of sexual diversity, the new-rural tendency after the economic recession and the pandemic, and the rise in community activism after the *Indignados* movement following the 2008 global financial crisis. Through music, Asturias and the Asturian language both participate and respond to local, national and international trends which, drawing upon tradition, create unique ways of resignifying the past and of influencing the present and the future.

Keywords: Asturian music, activism, Rodrigo Cuevas, new-ruralism, Ún de Grao, post-folk, *tonada*, Coru Al Altu la Lleva, *Caja de músicos*, choir.

Resume: Esti artículu analiza la recuperación de la tradición y les nueves formes d'activismu y texiú de redes comunitaries na música n'Asturies tres de la crisis financiera de 2008. Col estudiu específicu d'artistes como Rodrigo Cuevas, ún de los nuevos músicos con mayor reconocencia dientro y fuera d'Asturies; Ún de Grao, el proyeltu musical de Xosé Martínez Álvarez; miembru de la conocida como xeneración «post-folk», que busca dar puxu otra vuelta a la tonada; y el Coru Al Altu la Lleva, que, nació de l'atmósfera de l'asociación *Caja de músicos*, sigue cola tradición de la música coral poniendo un procuru especial nel activismu, mesmo xunto al perconociu músicu asturianu Nacho Vegas que de manera independiente.

La música asturiana de recién amuesa tendencias nueves na so rellación col tiempu y l'espaciu. Músicos y músiques busquen participar de manera global, ensin dilise en patrones definíos, al traviés de les sos diferencies y activismu. Dalgunos de los problemes colos que los músicos y músiques s'identifiquen son el papel que xueguen les llingües y cultures que conviven nun territoriu, el revivir un pasáu cuestionando ciertas idees de xeneraciones anteriores, la reconocencia de la diversidá sexual, la tendencia neorrural depués de la depresión económica y la pandemia y la medra del activismu comunitariu depués del movimientu de los *Indignados* resultáu de la crisis financiera de 2008. Pel camín de la música, Asturias y la llingua asturiana participen y respunden a les tendencias locales, nacionales ya internacionales que, sofitaes na tradición, creen maneres úniques de resignificación del pasáu y d'influencia del presente y del futuru.

Pallabres clave: Música asturiana, activismu, Rodrigo Cuevas, neorruralismu, Ún de Grao, *post-folk*, tonada, Coru Al Altu la Lleva, Caja de músicos, coru.

1. Introduction

Some of the tensions commonly associated with popular music —its upholding of both tradition and innovation, its creation of both an individual identity and a cultural placement within the social, and its nationalistic impulses which nonetheless trespass national borders¹— tend to be more accentuated in communities like Asturias, where many live and sing in a minoritized language. While the struggle for Asturian to be recognized as a co-official and vehicular language is still ongoing, Asturian has always been a language of music: even during Francisco Franco's pro-Spanish centralist regime, singing was almost the only way Asturian could be used publicly. Music still constitutes one of the main vehicles in which everybody in the region —even those who only use Castilian in their daily life— express

¹ These are some of the distinctive characteristics of popular music identified by music sociologist Simon Frith (1996, 2007).



themselves in Asturian. Asturian music, hence, has a unique role in creating Asturian identity: it speaks to individuals while facilitating emotional attachments to history, to the present, to Asturian songs and singers, and to internal, intranational and international communities.

One of the most interesting tensions in Asturian music has to do with its role in preserving a tradition in the Asturian language, while, at the same time, being a vehicle of change and activism. In the last decades, there has been a tendency to create a dichotomy within Asturian music which seems to mirror a partition within Asturian identity. This vision regards, on one hand, «traditional» music as linked to the rural, to unchangeable patterns and to older people, whereas «modern» music, such as punk, rock, or even folk, is seen in connection to younger, mostly urban, tribes with a desire to challenge the establishment. In this view, in the years since the Transition to democracy, traditional music would derive from the folklore associated with the *Coros y Danzas de la Sección Femenina*, with the idea of Asturias as the origin of Spain (or what has been called «covadonguismo») and, in some instances, with the imagining of Asturias as a *Paraíso Natural* detached from reality. On the other hand, «modern» music would be the heir of *Conceyu Bable* and the activism after the end of Francisco Franco's dictatorship, which gave way to the arrival of the *Nuevu Canciu Astur* and the literary *Surdimientu*, and is related to the tradition of Asturias as being the initiator of protests (such as the *ochobre 34* revolution, the miner strikes, and the protests after the deindustrialization in the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s). This opening of Asturian music to new forms also facilitated, down the road, the explosion of Celtic music, which enabled the creation of new cultural networks with the European Atlantic that bypassed the centralism of Madrid. It is undeniable that this division holds some truth. During the first decades after the onset of democracy there was an understandable drive to modernize and reappropriate traditional Asturian music, to use the Asturian language with new musical styles, as well as to sing in languages other than Spanish and Asturian (mainly English, with movements such as *Xixón Sound*). However, the modern and the traditional are not always separated or related to divergent historical heritages. Tensions between tradition and modernity have almost always been present as extremes in a continuum and not as mutually exclusive opposites: there are examples of innovation during Francoism (such as El Presi, who sang traditional Asturian songs with guitar and piano, and was criticized by the purists (Elipe, 2021, p. 115)), and traditional music and instruments have been used by newer artists in innovative ways. This transformation within tradition has been especially visible decades after the onset of democracy. Hevia, the bagpiper, is perhaps the most famous example, but the struggle to reappropriate the *asturianidad* and to create a modern, lived tradition has occurred in Asturian music since the 1970s.



The ever-present coupling between the new and the old is especially accentuated in more recent Asturian music. For example, the so-called *post-folk* generation continues to implement what Damian Barreiro (2006) has called “the third revolution of Asturian folk” (p. 14), coopting tradition in new ways. Some of the members of the new generation very consciously distance themselves from the previous «modern» groups (Barreiro, 2019, p. 16); other musicians, however, do not believe there should be any disdain towards the former Celtic generation (music{a}sturiana, 2022). How, then, do the newer generation of Asturian musicians couple the old with the new? How are they engaging with the past? If music changed in Asturias after the new beginnings brought by the end of Franco’s regime, is the most recent generation responding to the world arisen after the 2008 economic crisis, as is the case, as argued by some scholars, of the New Asturian Cinema (Martínez Expósito, 2019, p. 165)? In sum, how does Asturian music relate not only to its territory and other national and global trends, but also to time? Organizing our sense of time is, following Simon Frith (2016), one of the social functions of popular music (p. 266). How does contemporary Asturian music, then, conceptualize time for the new era? How does music sung in a minoritized language engage with contemporary issues and create a community of time and place through which its members can relate to the past, live the present and imagine the future?

The purpose of this paper is to analyze uses of tradition and new forms of activism and community engagement in Asturian music following the 2008 financial crisis. Contemporary Asturian music signals a recent switch in trends. During the first decades of democracy, after the end of the forced isolation brought on by Franco’s regime, Asturian musicians searched for international influences and sometimes blended in existing styles. In recent years, many Asturian musicians hope to participate globally, not by blending into any pattern, but through their individual difference and activism, which nonetheless draws on tradition. This is not to say that distinct styles and the recovery and reappropriation of tradition has not been present before. From *Conceyu Bable* to the present, many musicians and activists have been involved in reviving Asturian language and culture. However, newer musicians are adapting themselves to their contemporary challenges in a slightly different way, which, I argue, result in a particular relationship with time. In his study of Galician culture, José Colmeiro (2017) has identified music as one of the ways Galicia can be deperipheralized and deterritorialized, by challenging center-periphery dynamics and relating to the *glocal* and the *rurban*. In the same way, Asturian music can also create from the periphery and relate to different spaces. Through this analysis, I also hope to show that Asturian music, and, by extension, its language and culture, can produce a different relationship to time, that situates Asturias within tradition, and finds new ways to influence the present and the future.



When it comes to engaging with their heritage, recent Asturian musicians have some things in common with previous generations. When they look at the past, they do it without nostalgia (despite what is said on the lyrics of the famous song by L-R, «Veis Volver»: «nun hai memoria ensin señardá» (there is no memory without longing)). At least, they avoid what Svetlana Boym (2001) has identified as «restorative nostalgia». Boym recognizes two main types of nostalgia, connected to the etymology of the word. The *restorative* kind relates to «nostos» or the return to home, and tries to rebuild a lost past. It is generally linked to national memory, to monuments and to a single history. Restorative nostalgia characterizes the relationship with the past emanating from some far-right groups whose vision of the future would be realized if society goes back to what once was. In turn, *reflective* nostalgia, the second type of nostalgia identified by Boym, departs from «-algia» or the pain of longing. It dwells on the contradictions of modernity, ruins, and is linked to social memory without a single plot. Asturian musicians whose music has drawn upon Asturian tradition have, at least since the 1970s, rejected *restorative* nostalgia, which aims to recover the past without questioning it, and looked at the past with a kind of *reflective* nostalgia, recovering some elements of previous eras and questioning others. Boym also emphasizes that nostalgia is not only linked to the past: longing is sometimes directed towards an unrealized future. In the present study I will analyze how recent Asturian musicians engage with some elements of the past and also with current contemporary issues to create a vision of an alternative future that can or could have derived from the tradition they are reliving for the present.

One of the matters where some recent Asturian musicians depart from previous generations' relationship with tradition is that they not only reject the repressive Francoist past, but also often position themselves as separated from the culture of the Transition. In this sense, Asturian music seems to participate in a tendency that Luis Moreno-Caballud (2015) has called «cultures of anyone», which for him crystallized during the 15M movement. According to him, in recent years, Spanish society has questioned the culture that stemmed from the Transition and has disallowed the cultural authority of so-called experts: not their opinions, but the division between «those who know and those who don't know». This has encouraged anyone to create knowledge and to interact with culture in new ways, as recent Asturian musicians do. This innovation is sometimes forced by the impossibility of continuing with the systems of the past that have broken down. In *Hai una llinia trazada*, Xune Elipe identifies the period between 1998 and 2008 as the «gran época de la música asturiana nel momento actual» [the great era of Asturian music in the current moment] (2021, p. 205), a time of extraordinary dynamism cut short by the collapse in infrastructures due to the economic recession. The most recent Asturian musicians, as Elipe also recognizes (2021), are



nonetheless adapting and creating new independent projects (p. 206-207). I will study how their music, also understandably influenced by market forces, tends to question hierarchies of knowledge and to create a new relationship to time: some parts of the past become alive, and new communities are formed in the present, with a gesture towards futurity.

In what follows, I will analyze some of the most distinguished representatives of this new generation of musicians: Rodrigo Cuevas, arguably the most recognized new musician inside and outside Asturias; *Ún de Grao*, the musical project of Xosé Martínez Álvarez, whose main aim is to revitalize the traditional Asturian genre *tonada*; and the Coru Antifascista Al Altu la Lleva, which, born in the environment of the association of musicians *Caja de músicos*, continues the tradition of choir music and explicitly engages in activism, both with Nacho Vegas and as an independent ensemble. This article hopes to identify new tendencies in Asturian music as well as to contribute to current debates not only in Asturias, but also within and beyond Spanish society. Some of these issues are the study of the role of the many languages and cultures that coexist in a nation-state, the capacity of minoritized languages and identities to create new beginnings and speak with their own words, the rise in community activism after the *Indignados* movement, the awareness of sexual diversity, the fight for women's rights, and the new rural tendency after the economic recession and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Formed in what some scholars call «the intercrises period» (between the 2008 economic recession and the pandemic), recent Asturian musicians have been acquainted with international movements and protests. Most will remember the protests against the Iraq war (as is the case of Rodrigo Cuevas, who considers that lost fight one of the foundational moments in his activism) (personal communication) and were influenced by the *Indignados* movement of 2011, especially its commitment to community activism and its questioning of the establishment. They are also affected by the #metoo and LGBTIQ+ rights movements. Without a doubt, feminism and the questioning of traditional gender dynamics is present in their performances. Additionally, they place special importance on revitalizing the culture of rural areas, a phenomenon known as neo-ruralism, or the tendency of young people to leave the cities, motivated by the challenges of the housing market, the search for a sustainable planet, and the hardships of the pandemic, in order to live in the countryside. In this context, contemporary Asturian musicians have contributed to the revitalization of the music and culture of rural areas and raised money for community cultural centers outside the main cities. Additionally, some of them are involved in organizations dedicated to negotiating economic and legal issues related to music with the Asturian government, something that especially affects new musicians who sing in Asturian and wish to reach a larger audience.



To identify the engagement with tradition within tendencies between the local and the global, I will employ a perspective derived from the field of cultural studies. My sources will be academic writings by Asturian and international intellectuals, periodicals, as well as personal interviews with the artists². This research has also been developed from an international setting and hopes to disseminate new Asturian music internationally (see the «acknowledgements» section below).

2. When «The Opposite Is Barbarous»: Rodrigo Cuevas' «Folk Agitation»

The most renowned contemporary Asturian singer is Rodrigo Cuevas. He went viral with «Veridiciu», a 2016 YouTube video, and, since then, he has performed all over Spain and internationally. He calls himself a «folkloric agitator» and combines traditional Asturian outfits with stilettos and garter belts. His live folklore revitalizes tradition for the new era, mixing traditional musical genres with electronica. With androgynous costumes, and through humor, he raises awareness about LGBTQI+ issues and the history of that movement in Asturias. He also vindicates the importance of the preservation of rural areas, by visibilizing their culture through music, organizing community parties, and by raising money in social networks to bring infrastructure to rural parts of Asturias.

Cuevas' early years and formation are crucial to understanding his current success. From an early age, he combined musical education with the development of popular and innovative shows. In Uviéu, his hometown, he studied tuba and piano. His first professional music job was playing tuba with Uviéu's municipal youth music band, *Vetusta*. He later played in the municipal bands of Uviéu and Sama. He moved to Barcelona to further his studies in the *Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya*. In Barcelona he formed his first musical groups, and became involved in the theater and the circus world. There, he would busk, alone or with friends, and had several bands: one of them was called «La coña de la Bernarda», while another one was a big collective that started as a workshop for wind instruments in an okupied house near his conservatory. After Barcelona, he moved to Galicia, where he combined street singing, performing on the Galician TV in the TV show *Luar*, and work in a bakery. In 2012 he recorded his first album, *Yo soy la maga*, produced by Pedro Luis Centeno Villalba, blending traditional and electronic music. He then created a more permanent band, «La dolorosa compañía», with whom he played gigs every weekend. His first solo spectacle, in 2014, was *Electrocuplé* [personal communication].

² For this research, I have interviewed Rodrigo Cuevas, Xosé Martínez Álvarez (Ún de Grao), Aníbal López (member of the Coru Al Altu la Lleva and Caja de músicos) and writer and cultural activist Emma González García.



In 2016 he became famous with the song and video «Verdiciu», which mixes the lyrics of «La Gozoniega» (a traditional song by Marcos del Torniello better known as «Soy de Verdiciu») and the famous 1990s tune «Ritmo de la noche» by Mystic. Even though many considered him yet another fleeting summer sensation, Cuevas continued creating songs and shows, soon demonstrating that his talents went beyond a single hit. In 2017 he recorded an EP paying homage to Tino Casal (*Embrujada/Pánico en el Edén*) and in 2019 he released his most mature oeuvre to date, *Manual de Cortejo*, with Raúl Refree, aiming to create a new *cancionero* to update traditional music and bring folklore to life. His albums only tell half of the story since his shows are also paramount to his work. Cuevas flourishes on stage: he defines himself as a cabaret artist and a *cupletista*. His first show, *Electrocuplé* (2014), was followed by *El mundo por montera* (2017) and *Trópico de Covadonga* (which started in 2019). He has presented them in countries as varied as Spain, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Germany, Peru, France, Italy, United Arab Emirates, and the United States, among others. In addition, in 2018 he participated in musical theater shows such as *Verbena de la Paloma* and *Horror, el show que nunca debió hacerse* (based on *Rocky Horror Picture Show*), he has written music for the theater comedy *Sidra en Vena* and presented the TV show *El camino* in the Asturian television (TPA) about the places in Asturias where one can follow the Way of St. James. In 2019, he performed in the musical theater show *Barbián, Zarzuela cabaret* (Cuevas, Rodrigo <https://rodrigocuevas.sexy/>).

Despite all these different influences and international components, and the fact that he does not always sing in Asturian, Rodrigo Cuevas is clear in stating that he makes Asturian music (personal communication). Indeed, he frequently sings and speaks in Asturian, a language he did not study in school but in which he was always interested. Mass media had a big impact in Cuevas' formation as an Asturian speaker. He was eager to read newspapers in Asturian, such as *Les Noticias*, and to read books in Asturian. He watched the news in Asturian in Tele Oviedo, and listened to Radio Sele. Later on, while living in Catalonia and Galicia, he saw the possibilities for a minoritized language to be a vehicular language. In his view, the possibility of speaking several languages enriches everybody: people not only learn more about their culture but also have more ease when learning a subsequent language (personal communication). The fact that Rodrigo Cuevas speaks and sings in both Asturian and Spanish (among other languages) reflects the bilingualism that characterizes many inhabitants of the region. His Asturian emphasizes regional variation: he tends to use the language of Piloña, where he resides. This is also reflective of traditional music, which tends to not always comply with formal language norms. His relationship with language is, like most of his work, open to variation and to non-hegemonic interpretations of identity.



Both as a musician and as a performer, Cuevas represents a new way of looking at Asturian identity, tradition and activism. He envisions being a «folkloric agitator» as something «smaller» than an activist, because he does not dedicate his whole life to fight for political causes (personal communication). In what follows, I will analyze what I consider the most important aspects of his activism, and how they appear in his performance, cultural interventions and song lyrics. I argue that his activism relates to his creation of heterogenous communities that cut through gender difference, time and space, and unveil new structures of feeling (as the term was coined by Raymond Williams) that resignify certain elements of the past while producing a different present.

Rodrigo Cuevas is perhaps most famous for displaying an aesthetic which mixes traditional Asturian clothes, such as the *montera picona* (traditional Asturian hat) and the *madreñas* (traditional Asturian clogs made of wood), with daring makeup and lingerie. Asturian designer Kös creates his wardrobe, inspired in renewed tradition and the countryside. The mixing of the old and the new in his aesthetic mirrors the temporal blending he exhibits in this music and activism. He is perhaps more recognized because his performances question traditional gender differences. For that, he was granted the prestigious «Arcoíris» [Rainbow] national award. The Spanish Ministry of Equality hailed him «Por su visibilización de la diversidad sexual y de la libre expresión de género recuperando espacios tradicionales como el de la música folk» [For making sexual diversity and free gender expression visible by recovering traditional spaces such as folk music] (2022). In addition to adding a queer idiosyncrasy to folk music and traditional clothes, he recovers historical memory of gay Asturians. His song «Rambalín», included in his 2019 LP *Manual de Cortejo*, pays homage to Alberto Alonso Blanco, «Rambal», a famous gay man who used to live and perform in Cimavilla, the famed fisherman quarter of Xixón, during the 20th century. In 1976, he was killed in a murder that was never resolved because all evidence was destroyed. The song educates the public about Rambal, Asturian history, and about the injustices committed against the LGBTQI+ community in Xixón. With this song, his audience feels, through the music, the emotions related to this brutal murder and injustice³.

One of the main characteristics of Cuevas' practice is performing live folklore, tying older traditions and stories to a vital present. He has been influenced by some Latin American artists that have tapped into traditional and popular Mexican music to popularized it internationally while making it modern, like Lila Downs (personal communication). In an interview with the *Anuariu de la música asturiana* of 2016 he made clear how he relates to folklore in a lively, present way:

³ Other Asturian creators who have recovered the story of Rambal, and from whom Cuevas draw his inspiration are Miguel Barrero (2016) and Pilar Sánchez Vicente (2018). Pablo und Destruktion also mentions Rambal in his 2019 song «Gijón».



A min nun me presta muncho dicir que faigo música tradicional. Interesóme siempre muncho la electrónica y, como dicía, el folclor. Yá de pequeñu llamábame l'antropoloxía, la etnografía... Siempre noté que yera la forma de vivir más sostenible qu'existía. Preguntéme por qué se desanicaba. [...] descubrí que'l folclor nun yera dalgo del pasáu. Pa min ye dalgo supermoderno. Ye vanguardista. Siempre ta a lo último. Hasta hai cincuenta años, el folclor yera'l que contaba lo que pasaba. Quixi xuntar too esto, pero dende un puntu de vista sinceru, porque pues xuntar dos coses y que nun casen pa nada. Yo quería que valieren pa espresar tolo que tengo dientro (p. 46-47).

[I am not very fond of saying that I do traditional music. I have always been interested in electronic music, and, like I said, folklore. Since childhood I liked anthropology, ethnography... I always noticed that it was the most sustainable way of life that there was. I asked myself why it was ending. [...] I discovered that folklore was not something from the past. For me it's something super modern. It is avantgarde. It is always fashionable. Until fifty years ago, folklore was that which told what was happening. I wanted to unite all of that, but from a sincere point of view, because you can put two things together and they do not fit at all. I wanted them to be useful to express what I have inside.]

He continues:

Sicasí, tolo que pasó paezme que ye un reflexu de la necesidá de qu'hubiere una figura que representare tou esi movimientu. Toes eses ganes que tien la xente de sentir dalgo asturiano, de sentir folclor. Pero non dende'l puntu de vista de dir a ver una muestra de folclor; quieren ver folclor vivu y actualizáu. Una cuestión que ye difícil, porque'l nuestro folclor nun ye como'l flamencu, que siempre tuvo una tradición reformista. Equí hai que dar un saltu de trenta años y ye mui difícil dar un saltu tan grande. Más tovía pa cayer de pie (p. 47).

[Nonetheless, everything that happened seems to reflect the need of a figure that represents all that movement. The people were looking forward to hearing something Asturian, to hearing folklore. But not from the point of view of going to see a folklore showcase; they want to see live and current folklore. An issue that is difficult, because our folklore is not like flamenco, which always had a reformist tradition. Here, you need to jump backwards thirty years, and it is very difficult to jump that far. Especially to land on your feet.]

The practice of live folklore, which, for Cuevas, was common in the times of our grandparents, but had been lost now, unites the past with the present, subverting traditional notions of time. In *Manual de Cortejo*'s first track, «Namás s'acaba lo



que nun se cunta» [Only that which is not told ends], Cuevas' voice recites what amounts to a declaration of intentions about his art and for the rest of the album⁴:

*De les manes fuertes
Y de la casa grande
Nun queden más que la solombra
De los pesares y les alegries de la vida
Nun queda más que la vida contada
Nel escañu de la cocina
[...]
La siega ensin mies...
Volvióse too pallabra
Y equí andamos nós
Escuchando al vieyu
Viviendo lo non vivió
Pola so boca
Faciendo de la so memoria la nuestra
Amarrando la so hestoria
A la nuestra propia vida*

[Of the strong hands
And the big house
There is no more than shadows
Of life's sorrows and joys
There is no more than the life told
On the kitchen bench
[...]
The harvest without grain
Became all word
And here we are
Listening to the old man
Living what we did not live
Through his mouth]

In this way, when the material disappears, words are the means by which newer generations can keep alive that which has passed, a practice that is at the heart of Cuevas' music. In the next song, «Muerte en Montilleja» [Death in Montilleja], which functions as a continuation of the first track, he relates this notion to his own legacy:

⁴ For this research, I will analyze some lyrics that have been written by Cuevas and some others that have been chosen by him and come from traditional songs. I think both acts (writing and choosing) contribute to create meaning in his art.



*Morirse siendo querido
 Qué hermoso sería morir
 Morirse siendo querido
 Pero qué amarga es la muerte
 Cuando la muerte es olvido
 [...]
 No tiene por qué haber pena
 Si se muere este que canta
 No tiene por qué haber pena
 Cántenme coplas alegres [...]*

[To die being loved
 How beautiful it would be to die
 To die being loved
 But how bitter is death
 When death is forgetfulness
 [...]
 There is no need for sorrow
 If this one who is singing dies
 There is no need for sorrow
 Sing me happy couplets]

Death is only final if followed by forgetfulness; however, songs can keep someone alive who has disappeared materially. Cuevas puts this into practice at the end of the album, with «Rambalín», the penultimate song. He converts Rambal's life into song so it can live in memory⁵. The song also adds a voice that is not Cuevas' to tell Rambal's story: that of la Fredesvinda Sánchez González «la Tarabica», a beloved woman from Cimavilla who lived in the neighborhood until her passing in 2013. Taken from the Archivo de Fuentes Orales para la Historia Social de Asturias, [Archive of Oral Sources for the Social History of Asturias] Tarabica's recordings appear in several other tracks. In «Rambalín», Tarabica's voice literally blends with Cuevas' music, while they both tell the story of Rambal from different perspectives and points in time⁶. This technique recovers historical memory and challenges the idea that the stories of the past (both Rambal's and Tarabica's) are dead. Cuevas' live folklore questions the conception of linear time whose unfettered march towards the future does away with the past. He shows a timescale that goes beyond an individual's lifespan, connecting with a larger community in time.

⁵ When performing «Rambalín» in RTVE after receiving the «Ojo crítico» award, Cuevas says, quoting Manuel Machado, that he sings so that «lo que perdió de gloria, que lo gane de eternidad» [what he lost of glory, he shall win in eternity].

⁶ In 2020, Rodrigo Cuevas also appears talking and singing in the show *Carne Cruda* with Ida, Fredesvinda's younger sister, whom he is friends with, adding one more perspective to the story.



Cuevas's notion of time and space also goes beyond the human, engaging with ecological critiques that advocate for thinking a more-than-human conception of time (such as, for example, Timothy Morton's *ecological thought* or Jeffrey Cohen's *long ecology*). These currents of thought tend to view life as a relation between different organisms, questioning the idea that pure «nature» exists. One of the consequences of the ecological crisis, according to the editors of *Timescales: Thinking Across Ecological Temporalities* (Wiggin et al., 2020), is that it

scrambles twin assumptions at the heart of Western positivism: (1) time is a linear, uninterrupted march toward progress; and (2) nature is an atemporal, boundless resource underpinning, but largely separate from, the human historical experience. (p. xiii)

Rodrigo Cuevas' music also questions these assumptions: as seen above, his songs mix the past with the present, keeping memory alive and disrupting linear time. At the same time, he has a special communion with the rural places, both the land and the animals, which is not seen as the opposite to «historical» human experience. Another verse of «Muerte en Montilleja», says:

*El día que yo me muera
Nun m'enterrar en sagrao
Enterraime nun práu verde
Per onde pasti'l ganáu*

[The day I die
Do not bury me on sacred land
Bury me in a green field
Where the cattle graze]

Here, he vindicates an embodied materiality as opposed to the immaterial religious glory. He wants to blend his body with the land and eventually be food for the animals that will eat what grows from it.

Another example of a human being attached to a place can also be seen in «Rambalín». Rambal is described as an important part of Cimavilla, in communion with the neighborhood and the ocean:

*Cimavilla, cuando te pasea Rambal
Su cadencia-y marca'l ritmo a la mar
Cimavilla, paseío de Rambal [...]*

[Cimavilla, when Rambal walks you
His cadence marks the rhythm of the sea
Cimavilla, promenade of Rambal]



After the song relates Rambal's assassination, the lyrics change to:

*Cimavilla, cómo te llora Rambal
Tu cadencia no-y marca 'l ritmo a la mar
Cimavilla, ya no te pasea Rambal*

[Cimavilla, how Rambal cries for you
Your cadence does not mark the rhythm of the sea
Cimavilla, Rambal no longer walks you]

The protagonist of this story is not only Rambal, but the Cimavilla neighborhood which is invoked in these verses. The community and the sea have lost one of their important members. Rambal's murder affects his life, cut too short and without consequences for the perpetrators; and it is also violence against the environment he inhabited, which also possesses different, interconnected time-scales: that of the more voluble human life, that of the city and that of the ocean.

Cuevas' union of the human with the environment thus not only subverts traditional notions of temporalities that go beyond the human, but also reconceptualizes space. In particular, Cuevas relates to rural space. This is demonstrated by his life experiences, which he also transmits to his activism. He does not idealize the countryside but recognizes the hard work involved in living on a farm; simultaneously, he emphasizes how vibrant the rural environment is and how important it is for sustainability. In the documentary *Rodrigo Cuevas. Campo y tablas* (García Postigo and Campos, 2017) he explains «Mi sueño sería que el campo se llenara de gente. Solo en el campo la gente es libre, en la ciudad se tiene que traer todo de fuera. Es la única solución.» [My dream would be that the countryside would fill up with people. Only in the countryside people are free, in the city everything has to come from outside. It is the only solution]. Rodrigo Cuevas moved to a farm in Galicia before the height of the current new-rural trend that stemmed from the 15M and was exacerbated with the pandemic⁷. He said in a 2017 interview with *El periódico* that he wanted to move to a place where people are born and die in the same place, as opposed to cities such as Barcelona where some people are detached

⁷ While the so-called back-to-the-land movement took place in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, the new-rural movement happened in Spain some time after that (see Nogué, 2012 for a contextualization of new-ruralism in Europe). The latest new-rural tendency in Spain is represented by diverse migration movements and artistically in popular novels such as *Intemperie* (Carrasco, 2013), *Los asquerosos* (Lorenzo, 2018), *Tierra de mujeres* (Sánchez, 2019) or *Feria* (Simón, 2020). It is worth noting that *Feria*, in addition to rethinking rural space, is also reappropriating time. Prologued by Asturian musician Pablo Und Destruktion, it participates in a kind of restorative nostalgia (Boym, 2001), that tries to go back to an idealized past. In Asturias, the relationship between traditional music, the rural and the non-human is not uncommon. For example, see the analysis of Llorián García Flórez of the *30 Asturianaes de Carlos Rubiera* (2020).



from the place where they live. He appears in pictures with animals and challenges the notion that the rural is outdated, and outside of time. He also participates in crowdfunding campaigns, such as the reconstruction of «La Benéfica» in Piloña, Asturias, to make it a cultural center to host events in rural areas. He organizes community parties such as «Una señora fiesta», where famous musicians play in the town where he lives. He not only brings the rural to the city, but also other culture to the rural, challenging dichotomies by which the rural and the urban are rendered as opposites that should be separated.

Cuevas' live folklore creates a new kind of community by highlighting connections with the past and with a more-than-human, more-than-urban environment. It also facilitates a more meaningful connection between individuals in the present. When asked about some of the reasons why his art is so well-liked and connects with so many people, he explained that it is the power of folklore as something popular, collective, and self-managed, where one does not need money, or anybody from outside your town, but rather only what one has at hand, such as a tray, a paprika can, some spoons. One can create a great party with very simple ingredients where people sing and dance (personal communication). This, according to Cuevas, raises community self-confidence, because it is simple, created in common, accessible, and it belongs to everybody. He seeks to transmit this feeling through his music and practice. He is also very proud that his public is quite heterogeneous. It is perhaps due to the fact that he does not identify with a label like *rock* or with a specific musical tribe: anybody who wants to join his live folklore can feel welcome. The opposite of this community, he states, is barbarous [*Lo contrario es barbarie*] (personal communication).

In the wake of a polarized, us-versus-them society, his emotional response of bonding together can be seen as subversive, although it also touches on an idealized vision of music and culture. Cuevas asserts:

[...] *Todo el rato estamos recibiendo el input del odio hacia el otro, porque el otro es el contrario, el enemigo; todo el rato están intentando que nos pongamos en un extremo y miremos hacia los demás como opositores, y al final las músicas y la lengua y todo lo que es la cultura popular lo compartimos todos, es algo que nos une, que en ese momento desdibuja todas las diferencias entre las personas.*

[...]

Porque nosotros cantamos “La Tarara” igual que la canta una persona de Vox.
(personal communication)

[All the time we receive messages of hate against the other, because the other is the contrary, the enemy; all the time they are trying to get us to take extreme positions and look at the others as the opposition, and in the end we all share music and language and everything that is popular culture, it is something that unites us, that in that moment blurs the differences between people.



[...]

Because we sing “La Tarara” the same that way that a person from Vox sings it.]

Live folklore is important—and revolutionary—because it is that which unites us, what we all have in common. To achieve this, Cuevas also uses humor in his performance as a very important tool, both to laugh at himself and to reach more places on the ideological spectrum. He explains:

Bono, ye qu'hai xente que considera que l'humor ye dalgo despectivo. Otra manera, pa min el folclor nun ye más pequeñu que la ópera. Nun ye nin más pequeñu nin más grande. Ye dalgo peculiar y xenuín nuestro, polo que lo tomo col mesmu respetu que tomo otres coses, como l'humor. L'humor ye una arma cola que pues llegar a munchos sitios meyor que col discursu más politizáu. Tamién toco'l discursu sexual, pero col que pues llegar a tocar tol espectru del panorama ideolóxicu ye col humor. (p. 48).

[Well, the thing is that there are people who consider that humor is something derogatory. In turn, for me folklore is not smaller than opera. It is not smaller or bigger. It is something peculiar and genuine from us, so that I take it with the same respect that I take other things, like humor. Humor is a weapon with which you can reach places better than with the more politized discourse. I also touch on sexual discourse, but the thing with which you can get to touch all the spectrum of the ideological panorama is with humor].

Rodrigo Cuevas’s activism, in sum, is rooted in making minoritized styles, ideas and beings important, while creating a community through time and space. His unique artistic work does not create a homogenous model to be copied and replicated. Instead, he produces a new beginning and legitimizes others who might come after him and wish to keep questioning hierarchies while engaging with tradition in new ways.

3. The Blended Purism Of Ún de Grao: The Tonada As A Process

Ún de Grao is the personal project of Xosé Martínez Álvarez, an artist who blends the traditional Asturian repertoire, mainly the *tonada*—usually sung *a capella* or accompanied by bagpipe—with different rhythms and a guitar as accompanying instrument. The two albums of his solo career are *Ún de Grao*—an EP from 2017, which is a reinterpretation of four *tonadas* (and of a traditional *cantar de ronda*) characterized by an extensive work with arpeggios—and *Pelo Segao*, from 2018, an LP that features *tonadas*, *añadas* (traditional lullabies) and a *habanera*, where there is more work with a guitar pick, drums, electric bass, and of course the guitar, as well as rhythms and harmonies from styles such as rock, hard rock, and jazz.



Regularly included in the post-folk generation, Ún de Grao connects with a group of musicians leading a revival of traditional music while distancing themselves from the previous Celtic cohort. «Post-folk» was first used and popularized by the very successful L-R, one of the most important formations in this new period. L-R is a duo composed by Leticia Baselgas and Rubén Bada, who revitalize folklore by using the tambourine (an instrument that has oftentimes been looked down upon) and by raising awareness of the role of women in traditional music. Other formations commonly considered post-folk are Antón Menchaca, Cantaruxare, the bagpipe band LaKadarma and even Rodrigo Cuevas (Barreiro, 2019). According to Ún de Grao, during the 1980s and 1990s, many musical Celtic bands tended to use the rhythmic and potent structures popular in Ireland and Scotland some decades earlier. Even if folk music is generally open to a mixture of different elements, Asturian post-folk, for Martínez, focuses on an evolution and a critical reinterpretation of traditions, including Celtic folk. He recognizes that other bands are also working with the tradition and mixing it with different musical styles, such as progressive rock and punk rock (among others, Dixebra and La Tarrancha). The difference, for Ún de Grao, is that bands before post-folk do not work with the tradition in such a purist manner. By “purism” he means that post-folk groups use a traditional song, a melody that is already formed, and they blend it with a harmony or rhythm that comes from other styles such as blues, rock or jazz, but by wholly respecting it: they generally work with the songs from start to end. Other groups, however, perhaps are not considered to be renewing the tradition in the same way because they do not use the whole song; they take some details, maybe only a phrase, only the lyrics, or only the melody, and they add that traditional element as a bridge between phrases. Besides him, he recognizes this kind of blended purism in L-R, Antón Menchaca, Anabel Santiago, and even Fruela 757, who mixes *tonada* with hip hop, reggaetón and electronic music. In sum, the post-folk generation blends styles, which is something that has been done before, but from a different, purist, point of view, even if it seems paradoxical, because, for him, adding different harmonies is not a transgression. Ún de Grao coincides with other members of this generation, such as Baselgas, in that this is a natural process. He does not intentionally want to break from tradition; he considers his art spontaneous, and even traditional of the 21st century. Martínez spent his whole life listening to rock, blues, heavy metal and progressive rock from the 1970s, so those are the tools he has in mind when composing an arrangement for a *tonada* or a traditional dance (personal communication).

Ún de Grao’s musical formation is indeed a mix of different Asturian and international influences. Xosé Martínez Álvarez is a self-taught artist who has spent all his life perfecting his technique, both on his own and with various mentors, ranging from a priest in a town near his native Grao, to Rodrigo Strum, and to those



in the *Escuela de Música Tradicional La Quintana* of Xixón, where he studied. He was also influenced by his father, and by an uncle who played guitar and sang in a choir. Some of his very heterogeneous musical influences come from outside Asturias: for example, 1970s music from outside Spain, and several types of rock and psychedelic. He started listening to Asturian music later in life: particularly the music of Tino Casal, Los Ilegales, Los Berrones, Los Locos and Stukas. He remembers concerts by Felpeyu and Llan de Cubel as huge milestones in his formation. Especially, he was completely taken aback in his first *tonada* concert. After having spent time in Castilla, he went back to Asturias and felt an instant connection with Asturian music, so he decided to learn more about something he loved so much and that also had clear links to his heritage. Martínez spoke mostly Asturian at home, or, as he likes to put it, different levels of *amestáu*, and was aware of the diglossia within Asturias, as well as the fact that Asturian language was an important part of his identity when he lived in other parts of Spain. Martínez has played in various groups and collaborated with different artists before starting his personal project. His first endeavor was a heavy metal-influenced band called «Carneiro Puñeteiro». Later he played in some folk groups, and started using the open tuning for guitar, which is characteristic of folk music. He has also played with Héctor Braga, Xuacu Amieva and Pablo Carrera. Currently, he combines Ún de Grao with his work in his newest musical endeavor, the band Burbús (personal communication).

The *tonada* (also known as *canción asturiana* or *asturianada*) is the most used traditional base for Ún de Grao's blended music. Originating in the 19th century, this traditional Asturian song is characterized by its free rhythm and melismatic vocalization. Because of that, it has been compared to *cante jondo*, the famous Andalusian traditional musical form. Carlos Rubiera (2020) studies this comparison and concludes that the vocal technique for the *tonada* is very different: while *cante jondo* favors a “broken” voice, *tonada*'s vocal technique is whole, more comparable to that of opera. In that sense, the *tonada* is a popular lyrical style, which nonetheless requires a cultivated vocal technique (Rubiera 14-15). In 2015, the *tonada* was recognized by the Asturian Government as an «Asset of cultural interest of immaterial character», a distinction that acknowledged the importance of this popular, mostly rural genre, which is traditionally sung *a capella* or with a bagpipe⁸. Ún de Grao is one of the latest musicians that recuperates the *tonada* in a new way in both *Ún de Grao*, his EP, and his latest work, the LP *Pelo Segao*. In all his performances, Ún de Grao displays impeccable vocal and guitar technique, mixing old with new while being very respectful of traditional music that is now accessible for new audiences (personal communication).

⁸ For more information on the *tonada*, also see Braga, (2020), Rubiera (2020) and Elipe (2021).



All art is political, according to Martínez (personal communication), and he demonstrates his activism in several ways. His work is a renewal of a traditional genre not only because he uses a different instrument than the traditional bagpipe, and employs different harmonies, but also because he is changing the way the *tonada*, and other traditional songs, can be understood for this new period. Even if the *tonada* is freestyle, over time some models became more fixed. In *tonada* contests, the motor that keeps the *tonada* alive, sometimes adherence to a pattern is valued more than innovation. Ún de Grao, who participates in *tonada* contests singing more traditionally, also chooses musical innovation to revitalize the genre. Additionally, he modernizes it by being aware of its outdated gender dynamics and proposing some changes. He does not write the lyrics, but they are very important for him: he carefully selects and rules out what traditional songs he sings. For example, he usually does not include religious topics. He also questions outdated gender roles by performing songs that are usually sung by women, such as «Onde yo me pueda ir» (from *Pelo Segao*), which discusses crying and externalizing emotions, something that has traditionally been associated with women. «Nun llores nin», one of the *añadas* he performs, is sung in the voice of a mother who is supposedly comforting her child, but also includes indications for her lover, who is waiting outside. The woman explains that her husband is still home, so she gives directions for her lover to come back the next day. Additionally, Ún de Grao modifies some lyrics to make them more modern, thus updating the way traditional songs see heterosexual romantic relations. In «Caleya arriba cantando» (a song included in *Ún de Grao*), he changed the sentence «la que va a ser mi tormento» [the one who will be my torment] (referring to a woman, and implying the pain she will cause) by «la dueña de mi pensamiento» [the owner of my thoughts]. Similarly, in «La mio morena» from *Pelo Segao*, he revised the part that said «Si vuelve con algún otro / nun se lo que va pasar» [if she comes back with somebody else / I do not know what is going to happen], which for him sounds like an implicit threat, to:

*Si vuelve con algún otro
Eso dame que pensar
Nel conceptu llibertad
Que me presta muncho más
Que lo de tar propiedá
Namoréme d'un raitán
O sentilu yo cantar
Lo que nun faré xamás
Ye quita-y d'esnalar*

[If she comes back with somebody else
That makes me think



In the concept of freedom
 That I am more fond of
 Than of being property
 I fell in love with a robin
 Or I heard it sing
 What I would never do
 Is stopping it from flying]

His lyrics now emphasize that relationships can be free of pain, and that if somebody leaves a person for another, nothing must happen. That way, the song becomes a statement about open and generous love, instead of about possession. This renewal recognizes the problematics of heterosexual gender relations in the past, while also reinscribing them within a more contemporary model of the society he envisions for the future.

Ún de Grao's revitalization of tradition for the present day creates, as in the case of Rodrigo Cuevas, a special kind of community that thrives in live performances. In his concerts, Ún de Grao explains the story behind the songs, thus educating the public about traditional music. He also encourages his audience to dance. In almost every concert, such as one in the Plaza Mayor of Xixón in 2018, the whole audience joins in to dance in a circle or *corro*. That way everybody can feel and participate in the song. As it has been happening for centuries, these kinds of events blur the distinction between performer and audience. The musician is, on the one hand, the person that is seen and admired, and, on the other hand, the one that accompanies with his music the dance performance, made by the public. New musicians like him, even if on a small scale, are attempting the difficult task of both reviving tradition and preventing Asturian language and culture from becoming a relic of the past or being reduced to smaller villages. In his performance, I argue, he creates a community similar to the notion of *communitas*, a concept developed by anthropologist Victor Turner (1977), and previously applied to musical performances by cultural historian Irene Domingo (2017). His concerts are, like *communitas*, an anti-structure; they are liminal, ephemeral, and with people who experience the flow of a multitude. Turner specifically relates an iteration of *communitas* to the hippies and to folk (p. 112) and acknowledges the importance of *communitas* for the present: «communitas is of the now; structure is rooted in the past and extends into the future through language, law, and custom» (p. 113). In Ún de Grao's concerts there is a *communitas* «of the now», but the present also carries the structure of what is preserved, of the language and the traditional songs present in a «purist» way. He performs a hybrid genre that speaks to a heterogeneous rural and urban audience, of different ages and social classes who otherwise would not be together, literally joined by the hands and experiencing the same performance at the same time. Turner also connects *communitas* to what is sacred and holy since it



dissolves structured relations and has a special power (p. 128). Even though *Ún de Grao* avoids religious topics, he has acknowledged the quasi-mystical powers of his performance:

Esto quiere decir que para mí cualquier bolo es algo sagrado, esencial, parte imprescindible de la persona que soy, el único lugar de cuantos conozco en el que puedo liberar algunas de las múltiples personalidades que habitan mi ser; el único mundo en el que no necesito distinguir entre sueño y realidad, en el que siento una plenitud real y total... Es algo difícil de explicar, pero desde luego si yo rezara a algún tipo de deidad, sería a aquella que me posee en cada concierto. (La música amanseix les feres, 2019)

[This means that for me any show is something sacred, essential, an essential part of the person I am, the only place I know where I can release some of the multiple personalities that inhabit my being, the only world in which I do not need to distinguish between dream and reality, in which I feel a real and total fullness... It is something difficult to explain, but of course if I prayed to some kind of deity, it would be the one who possesses me at every concert.]

This feeling is often shared by his audience. His music both preserves and subverts, and the blend is also seen in the heterogenous audience that together can experience the flow of the present in *communitas* and, in this new iteration of the old, ground themselves in tradition in a modern way.

4. The «Coru Internacional Antifascista Al Altu La Lleva» And «La Caja De Músicos»: Singing And Acting In Common

The «Coru Internacional Antifascista Al Altu la Lleva» (International Antifascist Loud Choir) was created in 2014 by members of the cultural society «La caja de músicos» of Xixón, a bar and association that connects musicians, and fights for the recognition of their labor rights. The choir was first formed to accompany the famous singer-songwriter Nacho Vegas, who needed a choir to sing live while on tour, because some of the songs of his then-new album *Resituación*—which marked the singer’s incursion into politically-committed music—were recorded with a choir (the Coro de Ladinamo). Al Altu la Lleva was founded for the specific purpose of accompanying Vegas, but their constantly evolving trajectory has continued for many years since. They still display an overt political activism (more explicit than in the cases of Rodrigo Cuevas and Ún de Grao) which tries to influence the local and the present while connecting with a tradition of international struggles and Asturian choirs (personal communication by Aníbal López; see also Arantxa Carcedo in the «Programa Pieces» by the Asturian Public Television, TPA, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2952316755089908>).



Asturias has a rich history of musical associationism dating back to the 19th century. In Xixón, «La Armonía», founded in 1875, was the first coral organization «of serious character», as explained by Luis Arrones Peon (1978), the author of the *Historia Coral de Asturias*, a milestone study on the history of choirs in the region. It is also known that before «La Armonía» there were other informal coral groups, such as «Las chisteras» (Tolivar, 2008, p. 32). According to Xune Elipe, who has studied the history of Asturian choirs and their relations to activism in «Cantares de llucha» (2018) and in his comprehensive and essential history of Asturian music, *Hai una llinia trazada* (2021), many Asturian choirs have been related to workers' movements. The first choirs began in churches and were dedicated to enlivening the liturgy before secularizing as non-professional associations connected to the start of industrialization in the region and to the interest in Asturian musical tradition. Some of these choirs participated in May 1st celebrations (International Worker's Day) singing both Asturian and international songs, such as «La Commune», «La Marseillaise», o «L'Internationale». These explicit political beliefs, however, are not as prevalent in most present-day choirs. The current Asturian «coros mineros» (miners' choirs) are, according to Jean-Louis Guereña, heirs of the old socialists choirs (orfeones socialistas) born in the early 20th century. However, nowadays, they are more about community and shared social values, without preserving the older ideology (cited in Tolivar, 2018, p. 40). Nonetheless, choir activity is still widespread in Asturias and especially in Xixón. Specifically, in 2008 there were, according to Roberto Menéndez del Campo (2018), who studied the history of the Federación Coral Asturiana (FECORA), approximately one hundred and fifty federated choirs in the city, of which forty are children's choirs. The 2008 book, *Voces de Gijón* (Reverter et al.), a magnum opus dedicated to the current state of musical associationism in the city, features pictures and descriptions of thirty-four active choirs formations, many of them related to churches, who usually sing traditional Asturian songs.

The Coru Al Altu la Lleva is very distinctive in that it follows the tradition of activism that connects with the first part of the 20th century, sharing the politization that artists like Nacho Vegas experienced after 15M. The choir is currently formed by fourteen voices, nine women and five men. Their director, who does the musical arrangements for all songs, is Aníbal Menchaca. The collective is self-sustained and all decisions —such as choosing their repertoire, what events to participate in or what causes to support— are always achieved by a consensus. Inside the group there are members with formal musical formation and others that sing in a more intuitive manner, but they have in common their relationship with the association «La caja de músicos» and the nearby bar «La vida alegre», their love for music and their clear political commitment. The choir has been evolving from singing *al altu la lleva* [very loudly] to a more refined manner, and from being mostly focused in



accompanying other artists (such as Nacho Vegas, Toli Morilla, Losone or Delagua) to creating their own repertoire. They now have an original song, «Sudu y amor», [Sweat and love], based on a poem by Daniel García Granda written expressly for the choir and with musical arrangements by their director Aníbal Menchaca (personal communication by Aníbal López Marcos).

Al Altu la Lleva's performances aim to create a distinctive emotion and also provoke an effect of political and social awareness (Durán Rodríguez, 2020). Political commitment is the main premise of the formation. They have sung in demonstrations in favor of the Spanish Republic, in the 8M celebrations (International Women's Day), supporting the workers of the Viesques Campus of Xixón, or backing the hospitality workers lock-in in the Church of San José who were asking institutions to reconsider COVID-19 restrictions. They also have a clear commitment with Asturian cultural heritage and have collaborated with artists and singers singing in Asturian. Their first song in Asturian language was «Nun quiero coyer la flor» [I do not want to pick the flower] from Felpeyu. They later recorded a traditional song from the Quirós area called «La cadena del amor» [The chain of love], to support feminist rights. They have also translated international workers' rights songs to Asturian, such as «¿De qué llau tais?», originally «What side are you on?» a song written in 1931 by Florence Reece, wife of the miner and union worker Sam Reece, during a miner strike in Kentucky, United States. They sang it to support the eight-day strike to fight for a fair contract organized by the Association of Food Retailers of Asturias. Another international song translated to Asturian «Muyeres de la clas obrera», perfectly condenses the premises of the choir: the commitment with Asturian culture, their vindication of labor following the tradition of Asturian choirs and their internationalism, as well as their defense of women's rights. The original song is titled «Women of the working class» and was written by Mal Finch. It became the anthem of the «Platform Against Pit Closures» during the miner strikes of the mid-1980's in the UK. The lyrics connect with the values of community, and reference the past, present and future:

*Fuertes, llibres y en pie
 Queda muncho por andar
 El trabayu, la muyer
 y el so argullu de clas
 Xunies nesta llucha
 Cola mesma heredá
 Nun nos van parar
 Nun podrán
 Tovía queda muncho por valtiar
 [...]
 Y si hai un futuru
 Pasa por se organizar*



(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tItBFU-t9Qw&ab_channel=SrParaguas)

[Strong, free, and standing
 There is a lot left to walk
 Work, woman
 And her class pride
 United in this fight
 With the same past
 They are not going to stop us
 They will not be able to
 There is still a lot left to turn
 [...]
 And if there is a future
 It will happen by organizing]

Interestingly, the Asturian translation deviates from the original song, avoiding the reference to men and to the mines, perhaps as a way to bring it to the present and connect it to contemporary struggles. In Al Altu la Lleva's performance, men's voices accompany the women's for part of the song. These are the original lyrics:

You are women, you are strong,
 You are fighting for our lives
 Side by side with your men
 Who work the nation's mines,
 United by the struggle,
 United by the past,
 And it's - Here we go! Here we go!
 For the women of the working class
 [...]
 In fighting for your future
 You found ways to organize

In this song, which connects with Asturias revolutionary and coral traditions, the choir intends to influence the present by raising the awareness that women, and especially of the working class, can be fighters. The choir, singing as one, is uniting present and past with a future by means of a community, as other Asturian musicians are doing in different ways. Additionally, the future will only exist if we continue this community, doing things in common and organizing ourselves.

Al Altu la Lleva is indeed closely related to one of the most important musical organizations in Asturias, especially influential in musical activism in Xixón. The Caja de músicos was formed in 2008 as a meeting place and as a cultural association for musicians. Because there is no musical union in Asturias, the Caja



de músicos started to fill a similar place and even included other cultural workers and artists from different disciplines. Its space functions as an association and as a public bar which opens several days a week. There is a president, a treasurer and a secretary, all of which are volunteer positions. Its members pay a monthly membership fee to cover the maintenance of the space; they also organize themselves in different sections to influence governmental and public institutions. Additionally, their communications team has regular meetings to decide what issues they wish to bring up with the city and the provincial authorities. All their statements are in both Spanish and Asturian, to promote the use of Asturian. La Caja de músicos, thus, both connects musicians and represents the collective with the public and with cultural institutions. The issues they bring up are almost always related to the struggle to achieve fair labor conditions for musicians. One of their claims has to do with regulating live music in bars in Asturias. Bars are instrumental for emerging musicians: even if there are successful musical programs organized by the city of Xixón, such as *Siente Xixón*, and *Música na Cai*, sometimes newer artists who sing in Asturian have more difficulty being included and must rely on bars. The Caja de músicos, thus, lobbies institutions to both allow live music in bars (within a certain decibel range) and to support basic worker rights for artists who play in these spaces (personal communication by Aníbal López Marcos and Emma González García). This association shows, from the industry perspective, the important intersections between music, activism and associationism in Asturias, as Al Altu la Lleva does with its music. They promote Asturian music and culture, create connections between musicians, communicate with the public, and influence laws.

5. Conclusions

Recent Asturian music inherently relates to Asturian language and identity. Above all, it bears witness to a period, while explaining their connections with tradition, with the present and its structures of feeling, and with the various visions for the future. Asturian music also highlights the importance of community for the region. In the current era, community sometimes refers to human beings with their environments, sometimes has to do with singing and dancing in common, or with defending workers' rights by several means. The post-2008 Asturian musicians analyzed here are renewing traditional genres and raising different issues both old and new, many of them related to gender⁹.

⁹ It is worth noting that what I have analyzed in this paper is only a sample of the rich panorama of Asturian newer music. Further research might include other formations such as L-R, Fruela 757 or Llevolu'l Sumiciu, and key institutions, many of them directed by Xune Elipe and Xicu Ariza, among others, such as the recently created Archivu de la Música Contemporánea Asturiana (AMCA) [Archive of Contemporary Asturian Music], the Anuariu de la Música Asturiana (AMA) [Yearbook of Asturian Music], and the digital portal www.musicasturiana.com which, in the spirit of the famous



As I have shown, new tendencies having to do with renewal of genres and with political claims have arisen. Asturias is a community with a minoritized language and one of the largest regions in Northern Spain with a non-co-official, minoritized language that also does not border a different country. Nonetheless, Asturias and the Asturian language both participate and respond to national and international trends, creating unique ways to adapt and influence the present and resignify the past and the future. Music is one of the most important ways in which this is done. Since the onset of democracy in Spain, Asturian cultural creators and especially musicians have looked at tradition and appropriated it in diverse ways. Newer musicians are unique artists, who, at the same time, naturally engage with important issues in their era, without forgetting music industry constraints. Through their use of tradition for the present and the future, they create new ways to relate to Asturian social and individual identity and demonstrate the vitality of Asturian language, culture and their conceptions of time in an increasingly global setting.

Acknowledgements

A previous, reduced version of this study was presented for the first time in the SANtINA conference (Society for the Analysis of cultural Topics and Linguistic Identities n'Asturies), the foundational event for the creation of the Asturian Studies working group, currently based in the United States. I appreciate the comments from all the participants. I especially wish to thank my colleague Covadonga Lamar Prieto and Miriam Villazón Valbuena, as well as the rest of the organizing committee at the University of California Riverside for facilitating this event. Part of this manuscript was also shared in the «Asturian Studies» seminar celebrated in the University of Oviedo, within the conference ALCESXXI. I thank all the contributors —Eva Álvarez Vázquez, Luke Bowe, Luis Cuesta, Llorián García Flórez, Covadonga Lamar Prieto, Darío Sánchez González, Miriam Villazón Valbuena and Nataliya Shestakova— for their useful remarks. The complete research for this article, including the interviews with the artists, has been developed thanks to a Humanities, Arts and Design Research Grant from my institution, Oklahoma State University. I am also indebted to Fiona Noble and Luke Bowe for reading and commenting on a previous version of this article. Additionally, I appreciate the thoughtful suggestions of the anonymous reviewers and the superb editorial work of *Lletres Asturianas*. Finally, I would like to thank Rodrigo Cuevas, Xosé Martínez Álvarez, Aníbal López Marcos and Emma González García for taking the time to talk with me about their art and activism.

musicologist Eduardo Martínez Torner, compile, for the 21st century, everything related to Asturian current music.



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Recibíu: 17.08.2022

Aceutáu: 13.10.2022

