

Adapting

Copla

The Interplay of Languages in Making
The Copla Musical

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KEYWORDS

Cultural translation, Copla, musical theatre, foreignisation/domestication, intercultural adaptation

PALABRAS CLAVE

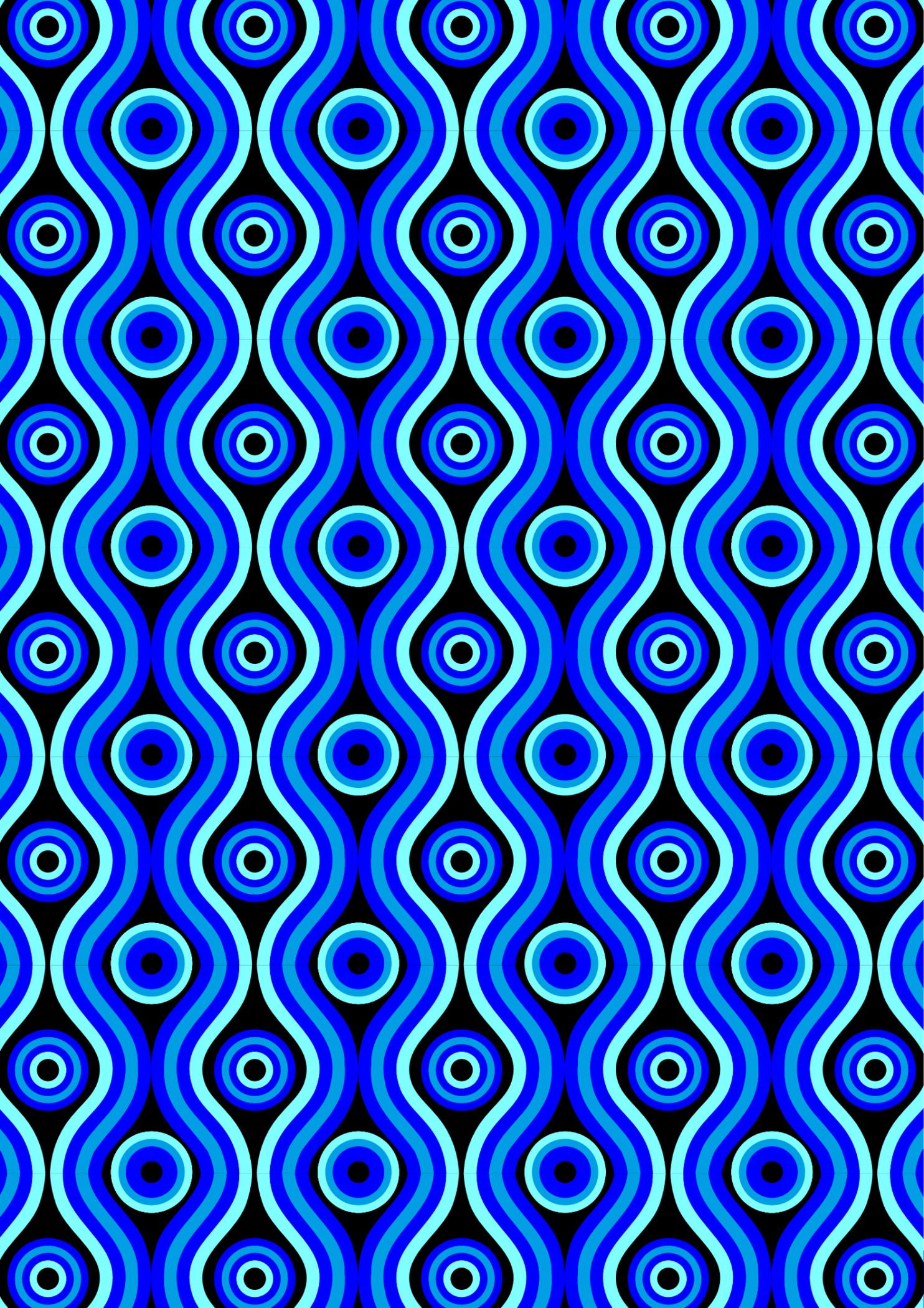
Traducción cultural, Copla, teatro musical, extranjerización/domesticación, adaptación intercultural

Summary

The process of creating *The Copla Musical* involved the translation and integration of twentieth-century Spanish *copla* songs into a theatre narrative in English. The songs had been rarely translated before, let alone presented in a theatrical context outside Spain. The development of this show involved the collaboration of an international team who helped transform a culturally and historically charged artistic form by tapping into the intercultural potential and subversive nature of the material. The results of this work were then presented internationally in the form of a contemporary theatre production. This practice opened questions of how cultural translation may effectively function in a global Anglo-centric musical theatre industry. In this article, I will engage with translation debates and discuss how the selection and translation of songs impacted on performance and music languages also subject to cultural translation. The article aims to explore how new dynamics of collaboration and creativity conditioned the making of *The Copla Musical*, an intercultural project from conception to execution.

Resumen

El proceso de creación de *The Copla Musical* supuso la traducción e inserción de algunas canciones de copla española del siglo XX dentro de una narrativa teatral en inglés. La copla ha sido raramente traducida o presentada en un contexto teatral fuera de España, y el desarrollo de este espectáculo implicó la colaboración de un equipo internacional que ayudó a transformar esta forma de expresión artística de importante carga histórica y cultural. A raíz de este proyecto, se desveló el potencial subversivo e intercultural del material y los resultados han sido presentados internacionalmente como obra teatral contemporánea. Este proyecto ha cuestionado las políticas de traducción en una industria de teatro musical globalizada y marcada por el anglocentrismo. En este artículo, me adentraré en debates de traducción y exploraré cómo la selección y traducción de canciones ha impactado en los lenguajes performativo y musical de la obra, también susceptibles a una traducción cultural. El artículo explorará las nuevas dinámicas de colaboración y creatividad que han condicionado la creación de *The Copla Musical*, un proyecto intercultural desde su planteamiento hasta su ejecución.



Throughout the last century, musical theatre has increasingly become an Anglo-dominated industry where opportunities for cultural exchange are rare and often limited to translations of Anglo-American commodities exported around the world. Translation theorist André Lefevere argues that the distribution and regulation of cultural capital by means of translation depends on the needs of the audience, the patron or initiator of the translation, and the relative prestige of the source and target cultures and their languages (1998: 44). In this article, I will explore the linguistic negotiations and politics of translation involved in the making of my musical theatre show *The Copla Musical*. Through the development of this artistic project, I have rebelled against the current impositions of musical theatre in Spain, which is heavily influenced by Anglo-American imports and uniform globalising tendencies. In exploring the potential of Spanish *copla*, an historical Spanish cultural form that did not cross Spanish-language boundaries,¹ I aim to contribute to reversing this uniform tendency. In *The Copla Musical*, I look at the political and linguistic implications of *copla* as an historical song genre that, throughout the twentieth century, creatively

1. While it is relatively easy to connect to audiences through the performance of *copla* in Spain, this does not work as easily outside Spanish borders as there is scant knowledge of these songs. Some *copla* artists were exiled to Latin America during the dictatorship, and some of the most renowned performers like Lola Flores and Concha Piquer have occasionally performed in international venues like New York's Carnegie Hall or the Parisian Olympia an exclusively Spanish *copla* repertoire, mostly unknown to these international audiences (Sieburth 2014).

managed to slip past censorship mechanisms at a time of dictatorial control in Spain, becoming popularised at both ends of a divided country and society. By doing this, I challenge the current market flow of many Anglophone musical theatre imports arriving to Spain but few Spanish exports making it abroad.

The development of an autochthonous musical theatre tradition in Spain was disrupted during the Francoist dictatorship from 1939 to 1975 and then progressively replaced with the importation of Anglo-American musicals in the period that followed the transition to democracy post-1975. This historical disruption of Spanish musical theatre occurred at a parallel historical moment to the American integration of song and plot into what is known as ‘the book musical’ between 1927 and 1943).² The Spanish musical theatre of this period was populated with *copla* songs. These are evocative songs that find their first musical foundations in folkloric forms like *pasodoble* and *flamenco* and are mainly differentiated from those musical forms by their theatrical quality. Despite the popularity of *copla* in Spain to this day, its relationship to other song styles and musical theatre forms from the U.K. and U.S.A. that have prevailed internationally has not been explored in any degree of detail. However, noting the increasing sensitivity towards mega-musical³ imports in Spain,⁴ I have, for the past decade, researched historical comparisons between *copla* and musical theatre produced in Britain and America with a view to facilitating the intercultural exploration

2. The establishment of the book musical is pinned to the period between the opening of the American musicals *Showboat* (1927) and *Oklahoma!* (1943) that were the first musicals to integrate libretto, score, and choreography with a dramatic goal.

3. Playwright and scholar Dan Rebellato defines mega-musicals as ‘visually spectacular, quasi-operatic musical theatre productions, many of them globally successful, performed thousands of times in front of millions of people in hundreds of productions in dozens of cities worldwide’ (Rebellato 2006: 98).

4. Marta Mateo (2008) and Mia Patterson (2010) explain in detail the growing demand for Anglo-American mega-musicals in Spain throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

proposed in my Practice-as-Research (PaR) show *The Copla Musical*. This project investigates *copla*’s roots as a storytelling form, its position as a folkloric genre, and its role as a subversive tool in Spain during the twentieth-century.

In creating *The Copla Musical*, I followed a phased intercultural process focused on collaborating with a group of artists representing both Anglophone and Spanish cultures. This process also involved presenting each iteration of the work to a diverse audience from Spanish and non-Spanish backgrounds who experienced the show from various cultural perspectives. My collaborators throughout the various phases of development have included the American directors Sarah Johnson and RM Sánchez-Camus, the British directors Dom Riley and Tian Glasgow, and the Spanish directors Reyes Hiraldo, Andrea Jiménez, and Enrique Muñoz. Similarly the creative team has included a variety of actors, musicians, and artists from British, Spanish, and other international backgrounds.⁵ This example of PaR looks at different traditions of musical theatre in Spain, Britain, and America and attempts to create a show that draws on all of these. The intercultural creation of a modern *copla* musical also engages with the principles underpinning the creation of musicals in the globalised twenty-first century. I would argue that the process of crafting a hybrid form of musical theatre through collaborative processes reflects the manner in which musical theatre generally developed in America, that is to say through appropriations of new forms and functions from other local and foreign cultures.

5. This included artists from Brazil, Greece, Colombia, Portugal, Italy, and Germany.

In this article, I will explore the dynamics of translation, history, and culture involved in the making of *The Copla Musical*. To do this I will engage with the debate of foreignisation versus domestication in the translation of texts and discuss the theories of translation and intercultural exchange as presented by Lawrence Venuti, Sirkku Aaltonen,

Steve Gooch, Eugenio Barba, André Lefevere, and Richard Schechner, among others. This research identifies the discourses of dramaturgy and performance style(s) in the context of the dominant paradigms of musical theatre produced in America and Britain and analyses how an intercultural approach drawing on a specific Spanish tradition challenges and explores the creation of a new musical by bringing material that has not circulated outside the Spanish-speaking world, in this case *copla*, into the arena of Anglo-American musical theatre. At the same time, the practice generates questions that challenge, renew, and complement current theories concerning intercultural adaptation.

An Introduction to our Intercultural Processes

The Copla Musical explores how the *copla* songs that once formed part of revues and folkloric theatre shows might be adapted and integrated into a contemporary musical theatre show conceived and presented outside Spain, thus negotiating the cultural identity of *copla* in alternative linguistic and cultural contexts. This practice aims to combine this Spanish folkloric song-form with principles inherent to musical theatre artworks found in Britain and America that I group under the term 'Anglophone musical theatre'. Anglophone musical theatre has drawn on and adopted a variety of indigenous art forms through its historical development. Therefore, it could arguably also facilitate the integration of Spanish *copla* into a book musical structure that could generate new interest in the genre outside of Spain. As per the book musical integrative

Poster of *The Copla Musical*, 2012
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Glamour, Romance and Loss
in the heart of the Spanish Civil War

The Copla Musical

September
26th, 8pm
27th, 3pm

HISPANIC
breakdown

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Free Entry (reservation essential)
hispanicbreakdown@gmail.com
Eton Avenue NW3 3HY, Swiss Cottage

structure of plot and songs, the individual self-contained narratives of participating *copla* songs in *The Copla Musical* required a process of restructuring to fit the newly written dramatic text in English.

Copla songs often tell stories of love, jealousy, and disillusion. Here the singer commonly exposes their religious beliefs, protests abuses of power, promotes national traditions such as bullfighting, or professes their love for the homeland, its landscapes, and its customs. Song narratives are mostly defined by an emotional journey in which the character either resolves their conflict at the end of the song or, as often occurs, dies. These self-contained narratives have structural journeys consisting of a beginning, a climax, and an ending within the short timeframe of three or four minutes. Integrating a selection of sixteen songs into *The Copla Musical* involved several compromises, such as modifying or opening the songs' beginnings and endings in favour of a longer narrative. The longer narrative of *The Copla Musical* aims to introduce spectators to the political and historical context of the songs. As such its plot is set in 1939, taking the audience on a journey from the Spanish Civil War into post-war Spain and America, through the experiences of a transgender artist exiled to America. This is a direct parallel to the reality lived by many artists that did not align with the socio-political impositions of Franco's dictatorial regime and were persecuted because of their beliefs, identities, and sexual orientations.

The selection of songs was made according to thematic concerns and their suitability to contribute to storytelling. As author of *The Copla Musical*, I spent numerous years crafting the script in negotiation with various songs that in turn determined some plot points and character developments. Like most creative processes in musical theatre, the storytelling impulse started with the writer, their creation then being handed to a group of actors and directors to facilitate dramatic exploration and the transformation of words into actions. With aims to create an

equitable basis of exchange, I gathered an international team of mainly Spanish, British, and American actors and directors that collaborated in the creation of the work. Additionally, the input of other international artists such as a dramaturges, lyricists, and musical arrangers has been essential in creating a bridge between Anglo-American and Spanish musical theatre cultures to facilitate this cultural exchange. Shannon Scrofano questions the possibility to develop a cross-cultural dialogue without sacrificing the unique identities of individual speakers (2012: 290). This is since in a creative engagement like this, artists must be willing to let go of their own cultural referents in order to understand how to position themselves within the project. Participants must be open to adapt their cultural knowledge and mode of expression for a common cause: a bridge of readability that represents an intercultural commitment. But what does it take for this cultural bridge to become the final goal, the performance?

Translation theorist Lawrence Venuti explains that a translator must consult many different target-language cultural materials (dictionaries, texts, values, paradigms, ideologies) throughout their activity, and that this consultation both reduces and supplements the text, even when source-language cultural materials are also consulted (2012: 24). This process is replicated to a variable extent in the creation of *The Copla Musical*. In leading the writing and production processes of this PaR project through its several phases, I have identified as a Spanish author and asserted myself as being representative of my Spanish culture, especially when collaborating with British artists. Nonetheless, since 2007 I have lived and been fully immersed in Anglophone culture, within which I encounter cultural values, paradigms, and ideas that I interact with at both personal and creative levels. The meeting of Spanish and English values is an unavoidable consequence of my life in England. However, this must also remain an active initiative as part of an effort to approach and understand a whole signifying system in which I did

Translating Copla Into Musical Theatre

not grow up or develop my cultural references. In seeking the positive acceptance of *The Copla Musical* and in the general interests of this research project, I have put my best efforts into becoming immersed within the target culture of the U.K.. However, this is not necessarily the case of my British collaborators: none of them spoke Spanish, neither were they familiar with Spanish culture before this project, and none had any previous knowledge of *copla*. Their experience of Spanish culture was filtered through my own, as well as through my artistic vision as the project's lead artist. In principle this does not sound like an equitable basis of exchange since both cultural agents do not participate in the project with equal conditions. Nonetheless, the act of collaboration was a chief motivation of this project in which we attempted to establish the relevance of new and hybrid forms, as driven by an understanding of the needs of the show to speak to today's world.

My artistic vision guided a process focused on incorporating other artists and, through a collective act of will and effort, expressing that vision on stage for others to experience. In *The Copla Musical* I used the source, Spanish *copla*, to explore the historical development of Spanish musical theatre and its potential externalisation beyond Spanish culture. My personal practice aims to rejuvenate *copla* in an international context while critically reflecting on the intercultural processes that are implicit in my research of historical revisionism in international musical theatre making. Practice enabled my position as a researcher and as an artist, allowing me to explore changing modes of readability from one culture to another. By producing a seemingly familiar form of musical theatre for Anglophone audiences, the 'known' was placed onstage to be witnessed. However, at the same time the 'not known' (*copla*) was also placed at the same intersection, in direct relation to the 'known'. The challenges of adapting the 'not known' into the 'known' affected several areas of the project including the dramaturgy, music, lyrics, performance, production, and reception of the new intercultural work.

As defined by Venuti, 'translation is the forcible replacement of the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text with a text that will be intelligible to the target-language reader' (2012: 18).⁶ Venuti asserts that translators receive minimal recognition for their work and that praise occurs by operating in an unnoticed manner.⁷ The transparency that Venuti refers to is, in most cases, challenging to achieve and, if taken too literally, can potentially be counter-productive. Such is the case with *The Copla Musical* in which the translation of *copla* songs takes place in a new historical and geographical context that differs from their original site of production in post-Civil War Spain — a political context marked by artistic censorship. The social relevance of *copla* songs in Spain is manifest in their role as part of the collective memory of Spanish society and as a key component of popular culture throughout a difficult period in the country's history. *The Copla Musical* needed to be formulated for an audience in Britain that would not be familiar with *copla* or its history. This audience needs, I would argue, to understand the contents of the show in order to engage with it. Alternatively, other strategies may be put in place to appeal to the emotions, as the original song lyrics did.

6. Venuti specifies further that while 'this cultural difference cannot be fully eliminated, it must however be reduced in favour of intelligibility in the new culture, which in itself offers a new set of creative possibilities' (2012: 18).

7. 'The illusion of transparency is an effect of fluent discourse, of the translator's effort to ensure easy readability by adhering to current usage, maintaining continuous syntax, fixing a precise meaning' (Venuti 2012: 1). Venuti defends that 'the more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator, and, presumably, the more visible the writer of the foreign text' (2012: 2).

Venuti talks about aiming for an ‘illusion of transparency’ to ensure easy readability of the original works in the new language (2012: 1). But how can translation make social, political, and personal contexts visible in the limited text enclosed in the lyrics of a song? *Copla* songs were mostly written and reached their peak of popularity during Franco’s dictatorship in Spain from 1939 to 1975. The meaning that these songs might achieve in twenty-first century England and beyond is unlikely to be concerned with the historical references that influenced the creation of the songs because their new audience is not privy to this history. In order to achieve an ‘illusion of transparency’, one must question how to convey the contextual messages of these songs and also reflect on whether they can stand alone outside the context in which they first existed. Ultimately, we need to consider the relevance of the songs’ historical premises for the songs to be presented in a new language, out of their original context. Margherita Laera defends that ‘a translation must above all “create a context” for the foreign text in the target-language performance. [...] The creation of a new context is necessarily achieved in collaboration with the director of the new theatre version’ (2011: 215). In *The Copla Musical* there is a double adaptation at play: firstly there is a linguistic translation of the song lyrics from Spanish to English and secondly there is a dramatic adaptation that involves the insertion of the newly translated lyrics into a longer narrative. This dramatic adaptation provides opportunities to further contextualise the original meanings and significance of the songs within the new narrative.

The Copla Musical, 2014
Director: RM Sánchez-Camus. Performer: Alejandro Postigo
© John Kentish



Many of the songs included in this project were authored by composer Maestro Quiroga and lyricist Rafael de León, one of the most prolific writing teams of *copla*.⁸ As this project advanced through its research stages, I sought permission from Manuel López-Quiroga, son of the prolific composer of the same name and inheritor of the copyright⁹ of his father's songs,¹⁰ to use some of these songs within *The Copla Musical*. Permission was granted and I proceeded to undertake the translations of sixteen of Quiroga's songs that would become part of different versions of *The Copla Musical*, in collaboration with a team of British lyricists. The translation of these songs went as follows. Firstly I attempted to create a direct translation from the Spanish original in verse that my British collaborators then modified to achieve greater connection with English rhyme, prose, and general idiosyncrasy. Following this I then reviewed the text again to ensure that the modifications matched the show's dramatic narrative while preserving the essence of the original material. This team activity encouraged a transparent discourse and the illusion of authorial presence that Venuti writes about. As there is no single authorial voice dominating the translation of the lyrics, these translations may be seen to remain faithful to the original writing of *copla* songs that were themselves a many-authored, cooperatively produced product. At the same time, such collaboration also helped develop

a new narrative for *The Copla Musical*. For example, in the adaptation of the *copla* song 'Tattoo' shown below, we can see the journey from the literal translation of the Spanish original lyrics that respected the Spanish grammatical construction of each verse, to the reordering of the sentence in a manner that adheres more naturally to English prosody and grammar, and finally to a rewriting that takes some artistic licences in order to develop the dramatic atmosphere of the song in the context of the show. This particularity about grammatical reconstructions demands special care when placing the stresses in verses, especially for the melody to underline the expressive nature of the words, as well as the original affectation of the musical beats:

SPANISH ORIGINAL

Errante lo busco por todos los puertos,
a los marineros pregunto por él

LITERAL TRANSLATION

Wandering I'm searching for him
at the ports
And to other sailors I ask about him

GRAMMATICAL REWRITING

Since then I've been searching and
wandering the ports
And I ask the sailors if they know of him

DRAMATIC REWRITING

Since that day I've wandered and searched
all the dockyard
Not a soul has heard of, or once seen
his face

8. Song titles in the project include: Y sin embargo te quiero (But I Love You Anyway), Te lo juro yo (This I Swear To You), María de la O, Dime que me quieres (Tell Me That You Love Me), and Tatuaje (Tattoo).

9. In relation to authorship, British and American law define translation as an 'adaptation' or 'derivative work' based on an 'original work of authorship' whose copyright, including the exclusive right 'to prepare derivative works' or 'adaptations', is vested in the 'author'. The translator is thus subordinated to the author who decisively controls the publication of the translation during the term of copyright for the 'original' text, currently the author's lifetime plus fifty years (Venuti 2012: 8). In Spain, this expands up to 70 from the death of the author in accordance to EU Law.

10. Editorial Company Seemsa, overseen by Manuel López-Quiroga y Clavero, owns the rights to most *copla* songs included in *The Copla Musical*.

Throughout the process of translation, we kept thinking of the new dramatic purposes of the *copla* songs inserted within *The Copla Musical*. We treated the English lyrics as monologues and dialogues set to musical underscoring in order to gain new insights into how and why the characters might need to sing their thoughts and how these songs might advance the narrative, sometimes with the assistance of underscored dialogues. Taking this approach, the new lyrics attempt to maintain deep emotional truth while they activate dramatic structures. Venuti presents a theoretical basis from which translations can be read as texts 'in their own right', with an aim to demystify transparency

(2012: 17).¹¹ Following his theory, it would be fair to say that *The Copla Musical* is a text of its own that departs from well-known but also historically and geographically localised sources and reinterprets them in a new context. Here a new set of signifiers is applied to accommodate and strengthen the value of the original sources. As such, *The Copla Musical* was created out of a negotiation between my love towards the Spanish original songs and the pragmatic idea that translations must function dramatically in the context of a musical theatre show for a U.K. theatre audience. Translation in this case needed to fulfil the objective of connecting with the audience and the sense of authorial presence is not a priority.

The *copla* songs in *The Copla Musical* try to evoke the historical function they originally held. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, *copla* became a dominant musical genre in Spain's intellectual, political, and artistic spheres and was disseminated through performances in cafes and cabarets with audiences from different social classes. During the years of the Second Republic from 1931 to 1936, *copla* songs were popularised across a divided population of opposing ideologies. This popularity continued for both factions throughout the Spanish Civil War between 1936 and 1939. However, at the start of Franco's dictatorship in 1939, fascist propaganda appropriated and manipulated these songs, as they did with many other art forms that had flourished in Republican Spain. Thus, during the Franco regime, *copla* singers were forced to present strong conservative images in tune with the national-catholic ideals of the regime. Those artists who did not align with the regime's ethos were persecuted, exiled, or at worst assassinated, as was the case of playwright Federico García Lorca, one of the first writers of *copla* songs. Nonetheless, many artists continued writing *copla* songs with implicit messages

11. Venuti's theory sees transparency as one discursive effect among others wherein translation is a process by which the chain of signifiers that constitutes the source-language text is replaced by a chain of signifiers in the target language which the translator provides on the strength of an interpretation (2012: 17).

and signifiers that managed to navigate censorship and connect with oppressed populations at the time such as women, gypsies, leftists, and LGBT closeted citizens. As the songs shifted their distribution focus from theatres and cabarets to the radio, their reach extended beyond expectations and managed to bring hope into many people's existences.¹² This history of these songs, widely known among older populations in Spain, might be seen as key to a Spanish audience's connection with them. However, concerning the attempt to convey some of this context to a non-Spanish audience, Venuti identifies some violent effects of translation that could apply to the project of *The Copla Musical*.¹³

One of the biggest risks of translating *copla* songs in this theatrical context is to distort their original idiosyncrasy to fit a constructed image of Francoist Spain. The songs are subject to misinterpretation in their new settings and international audiences run the risk of framing and classifying *copla* within the parameters of their own historical knowledge, therefore creating an image of *copla*'s cultural identity that adheres to a fascist ideology. Indeed, this risk is already very much present with interpretations of *copla* within Spain.¹⁴ Crossing national and cultural borders to export a controversially politicised genre only maximises the challenge of preventing misinterpretation. Other concerns responding to Venuti's proposed violent effects of translation relate to the characteristics of the

12. This is why Stephanie Sieburth refers to *copla* as "survival songs" for those oppressed during Franco's fascist dictatorship (2014).

13. Some of these effects are 'the construction of national identities for foreign cultures, the maintenance or revision of literary canons in the target-language culture and of dominant conceptual paradigms, research methodologies, and clinical practices in target-language disciplines and professions [...] constructing or critiquing ideology-stamped identities for foreign cultures, affirming or transgressing discursive values and institutional limits in the target-language culture' (Venuti 2012: 19).

14. During the dictatorship, censors changed some lyrics of existing *copla* songs, generating a lasting image of association to Franco's ideals. This image was often reinforced by the performance of the genre by artists of known allegiance to the fascist regime.

form of musical theatre itself such as the metrics of the songs, types of rhyme, semantic considerations, and how those are reinterpreted in the new language. Spanish is a syllable-based language, as opposed to English, which is stress-based. The regularity of Spanish rhyme, like most Romance languages, is very different from the irregularity of English rhyme and this affects the structuring of the language of songs.¹⁵ A clear example of this distortion can be exemplified when adjusting the *bulería* rhythm¹⁶ of the *copla* song ‘Carceleras del Puerto’ (translated as ‘Jailers of the Port’) for prosodic considerations. While the Spanish original lyrics matched the accents of *bulería*, this was not always the case in the English translation. The decision of altering the accentuation of this rhythm was made in order not to complicate the readability of the lyrics in English and to naturalise their delivery (Postigo 2016: 105).

Most studies devoted to translation and music have so far been centred on opera, a genre in which the text is primarily transmitted through singing. This is often the case as well for musicals, although musicals are ‘more realistic than opera in terms of singer-role matching and are closer to productions of plays’ (Mateo 2008: 320). While opera generally uses subtitles in its performances, musicals performed in foreign countries where English is not generally spoken (including Spain) are translated. This divergence is mostly due to social, historical, ideological, and economic factors rather than technical or artistic ones (*ibid.*).¹⁷

15. As dramatist Colin Teevan puts it: ‘You cannot actually translate an Alexandrine into English and achieve the same effect. One always has to devise a strategy, a correlative form, you can choose a non-verse form or an iambic pentameter form’ (in Laera 2011: 222).

16. Bulería is a Spanish rhythm with beats specific to Flamenco music. There are a total of 12 beats, with the phrase beginning on the 11th, accentuated as follows: 11 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10.

17. The translation of musicals is affected by the semiotic complexity of the text, the ephemeral and transitory nature of its reception, the multiplicity of agents taking part in a single production, and the difficulty of describing the target texts, variously labelled as ‘translations, versions, adaptations, and/or rewritings’ (Mateo 2008: 321).

As Marta Mateo recalls, there is danger in adapting foreign musical theatre texts according to what is assumed performable based on cultural expectations. These expectations might not always match the stylistic boundaries of the form and might call for an expansion of the audience’s cultural boundaries. Gideon Toury emphasises that the nature of translating is conditioned by ‘factors that govern the choice of text-types, or even of individual texts, to be imported through translation into a particular culture/language at a particular point in time’ (Toury 1995: 98). Mateo defends that while the source text of a musical is sometimes a factor in choosing its production, the most commercially successful shows rely largely on their popular music. There is a ‘universal’ nature to these works, whether or not the music is known worldwide or the scripts deal with cross-cultural and timeless issues (Mateo 2008: 334).

The absence of a cultural connection is one of the main problems in exporting a foreign musical to Spain, as demonstrated by the case of long-running U.K.-U.S. musical *Jersey Boys* (2005), based on a biographical narrative of the 1960s rock ‘n’ roll band *The Four Seasons*. In Spain, there are simply not strong enough cultural references to make the product widely appealing, or, at more basic level, understood. In musical theatre, there are internal consistencies that need to be observed, such as the interaction of music and text and the intertextual references that are created through those interactions. Musical motifs often recall other musical experiences attached to a specific culture. These referents are not shared across cultures because of linguistic, cultural, and historical specificity. As such, in the translation process, cultural proximity (or being too source culture-specific) can hinder musical translation. In Spain, Anglo-American musicals are frequently adapted to a Spanish context. For instance, the translation and adaptation of original libretti like *Victor Victoria* (1995) and *The Producers* (2001) have experienced strong text changes in order to gain

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acceptability in the target society (Mateo 2008: 57).¹⁸ In these and other cases, although the texts often remain source-specific, a strategy to tone down the reverence towards the foreign source is implemented. This results in a process of ‘acculturation’ that removes the cultural anchoring of a piece and eliminates or minimises the relationship to any specific culture (Aaltonen 2000: 55).¹⁹

Venuti argues that ‘the translator always exercises a choice concerning the degree and direction of the violence at work in any translating’ (2012: 19). As co-translator of the *copla* songs and author of *The Copla Musical*, I am responsible for the compromises made in the interpretation and choices in the translation of the songs. The consequences of this responsibility are determined by my personal experience of *copla*, acquired through years of research rather than a lived-experience of its development period. Nonetheless, my personal experience echoes the past experiences of some of the communities that originally identified with *copla*. Being displaced from my country sparked a new-born interest in exploring my Spanish cultural identity through the study of *copla*. It is as an immigrant that I have noticed the evocative power of *copla* and developed a personal relationship with these songs that has made me consider studying and disseminating my experience of *copla* to other cultures. My re-contextualisation of *copla* in a new language and cultural setting allows non-Spanish audiences to encounter *copla* through my artistic lens and with no other referents in English to locate the form.

As Laera notes, theatre translators metaphorically pull in two opposite directions — towards ‘on the one hand, the source (con)text, and on the other, the target (con)text’ (2011: 214). The opposing worlds of source and target feature at the centre of Lawrence Venuti’s definition of domesticating versus foreignising translation strategies. Venuti establishes an opposition between these two forms of translation, favouring foreignising translation that ‘signifies the difference of the foreign text, yet only by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the target language’ (2012: 20).²⁰ This translation method is dominant in countries like France or Germany. Anglo-American culture, on the contrary, is dominated by domesticating theories that ‘recommend fluent translating, reducing if not simply excluding the very difference that translation is called on to convey’ (2012: 21).²¹ The domesticating method is very much aimed at facilitating the understanding of receiving audiences and as such Venuti warns of a risk of the appropriation of foreign cultures for domestic, cultural, economic, and political agendas (2012: 18).

The debate concerning foreignisation and domestication is relevant to the adaptation of the original Spanish *copla* lyrics into English for *The Copla Musical*. Throughout the writing of the piece I often questioned whether I should try to maintain the idiosyncrasy of the original lyrics

¹⁸. Moreover, American poet Charles Bernstein reflects on why contemporary writing is enforced by its economic value. He affirms that ‘we are not free to choose the language of the workplace or the family we are born into, though we are free, within limits, to rebel against it’ (Bernstein 1986, in Venuti, 2012: 5).

¹⁹. Aaltonen also argues that this cultural relocation is a useful method when a translator wishes to guarantee the intelligibility of a foreign play as a piece of theatre (2000: 256).

²⁰. For Venuti, this translation strategy can be a form of resistance against ethnocentrism, racism, cultural narcissism, and imperialism in the interests of democratic geopolitical relations: ‘The theory implies that in its effort to do right abroad, the text must do wrong at home, deviating enough from native norms to stage an alien reading experience’ (2012: 20).

²¹. ‘Domestication replaces source-language features that are not recognizable with target-language ones that are’ (Venuti 2012: 21).

So, you gave your heart, yes but at what cost?



The Copla Cabaret, 2015

Director: Andrea Jiménez. Performer: Alejandro Postigo

or prioritise accessibility in the new language. Indeed, this dichotomy is often present in any translation work at the beginning of the process.²² Throughout the development and various international presentations of *The Copla Musical*, I have attempted different strategies to try and find the right balance between foreignisation and domestication. In the English performances of the show, songs often combine verses in

English and Spanish, thus maintaining a small percentage of the original Spanish lyrics. It is assumed that untranslated verses will remain inaccessible to audiences in terms of dramatic content. However, the English translations provided before or after each Spanish delivery offer context and a sense of the song, telling enough of the story so that non-Spanish-speaking audiences can still follow the general narrative. In this way these audiences are also offered a glimpse of what the song sounds like in its original language. I have experimented extensively with this idea. In some performances songs have been performed fully translated, while in others they have mixed English and Spanish. This has been the case as well when the show has been presented in Spanish-speaking countries where the songs have been sung in their original versions but sometimes English verses have been included to test the audience's acceptance.

²² Jean Graham-Jones addresses this translator's dilemma: 'Do we translators make the play accessible to the audience or do we make the audience accessible to the play? Do we attempt to do both?' (in Laera 2011: 214). Translator and dramatist Steve Gooch also warns about the 'twin crimes of translation: academicism, where obscure literary or social references are pursued to the detriment of idiomatic English; and the opposite ill where, in order to make an irritating foreigner "accessible", an off-the-peg style is reached for' (Gooch 1996: 17).

The debate between foreignising and domesticating approaches in translation has consistently featured across international currents of thought. In Friedrich Schleiermacher's words, there are only two methods of translation: either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards them or the translator leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards them (in Lefevere 1977: 74).²³ In *The Copla Musical* I have often veered from one extreme to the other. Whilst I consider it vital to preserve the original meaning and context of the songs, it is also essential to try and speak 'culturally' to the reader (or spectator) by adapting both language and cultural referents. In the case of *The Copla Musical* the latter is especially important since the acceptance of the project partially depends on its relationship with its audiences. To a certain extent, I want to send the spectator abroad, yet to do that I need to be able to 'anglicise' the foreign universe in question. There is, thus, some inevitable ethnocentric reduction of the songs, as Venuti suggests. My fear is that untranslated concepts in *copla* songs remain impenetrable to non-Spanish audiences and that this possibly results in a lack of dramatic appeal to those audiences without a very specific interest in Spanish folkloric culture, especially in this type of folklore developed more than half a century ago. By compromising some details, such as argots and manners of expression, the hope is that the spectator will be more drawn into the narratives told in the songs. However, in this situation the audience will inevitably miss some original references, so it seems impossible to win on both fronts. For instance, the protagonists of some *copla* songs were gypsies that spoke a language named

23. Venuti elaborates on Schleiermacher's dichotomy as choosing between an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, which might be seen as equivalent to transporting the author to the audience's cultural context, or an ethnocentric pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, which might be seen as equivalent to sending the reader abroad to the author's cultural context. These are Venuti's definitions for the processes of domesticating and foreignising within the debate he establishes (2012: 20).

caló. *Caló* words are likely to remain completely inaccessible to foreign audiences, even though they are commonly accepted in the Spanish versions of the songs despite their meanings not always being widely known. As Ivo Buzek (2013) points out, *copla* is generally written in an Andalusian flavoured Spanish and splashed with a few words from *caló* language to give the folklore a slightly exotic taste.²⁴

Accents and modes of speech are also something to take into consideration in translation. For instance, Eugene Nida, an advocate for domesticating translation, defends that transparency and accuracy in translation depend on generating an equivalent effect in the target-language culture (Venuti 2012: 22). This implies that communication is then controlled by the target-language culture. For Venuti this therefore seems less an exchange of information than an appropriation of a foreign text for domestic purposes (*ibid.*).²⁵ When thinking of applying these methods to *The Copla Musical*, I would argue that if Andalusian words/accents were, for example, translated into Northern English words and expressions, that would compromise characters' backgrounds and distance the songs from their cultural heritage. This was a method of domesticating translation that I chose not to engage with, demonstrating one of the reasons this project sits in the middle of the debate between foreignisation and domestication. However, according to French translator and theorist Antoine Berman, even when applying a foreignising choice, 'an otherness can never be manifested in its own

24. 'Las coplas generalmente [son] escritas en un español andaluzado y salpicadas con alguna que otra palabra del caló para darle al folklore un sabor ligeramente exótico'. (*Copla* songs are generally written in an Andalusian Spanish and sprinkled with a few *caló* words to season the folkloric form with a light exotic taste) (Buzek 2013: 39). The writings of Ropero Núñez (1978) provide another interesting source on this topic.

25. An example of this equivalent can be seen in Laera's translation of Bola Agbaje's *Gone Too Far!* (2007) from English to Italian. The Italian translation 'plays on the language differences between the rich and dominant North (Milan in particular) and the disadvantaged, dominated South of Italy' (Laera 2011: 215).

terms, only in those of the target language, and hence always already encoded' (Berman 1985: 87-91, in Venuti 2012: 20). This also implies that Andalusian features or heritage might prove unreadable to the target English audience. For Berman, who is a defender of domestication, the priority should be the effect of the text in the target culture. In theatre, this might happen even more prominently, as words are heard as opposed to only read. In practice, Andalusian accents tend to shorten words, aspirate some consonants, interchange /s/ and /z/ sounds, and apply a cadence or musicality to the phrasing. This sometime presents a challenge for non-native Spanish speakers to fully understand Andalusian speech and this challenge is exacerbated when applying these features to performance texts and songs in English, often rendering them practicably illegible.

As we can see through the few examples given, there is a difficult challenge in presenting *copla* songs out of their historical context. Klaudyna Rozhin speaks about 'the difficulty presented by the cultural context of foreign plays, and claims that although there are ways of domesticating foreign concepts, these are likely to undermine the otherness of the text' (in Aaltonen 2000: 256). Venuti talks about the illusion produced by fluent translating wherein the translator's invisibility at once enacts and masks an insidious domestication of foreign texts, rewriting them in the transparent discourse that prevails in English and that selects precisely those foreign texts amenable to fluent translating (2012: 16). In any case, *copla* songs are difficult to consider as transparent or amenable to fluent translating. This is maybe why this translation has not been fully attempted before²⁶ or that it has been attempted in Spain mainly for comedic purposes such as on television shows. The thought of providing an accurate translation of a genre like *copla*, that is so historically

charged, often results in parodic gestures aimed at Spanish audiences that reinforce the idea of *copla* being 'untranslatable', as no other culture would have the history and tools to fully understand all the layers and the idioms of these songs. *The Copla Musical* makes a non-exhaustive (as there are thousands of *coplas*) but qualitative research-led attempt at trying to recreate the value of a selection of songs in a new context. Here, even if the songs are presented out of their traditional time and place, their context is also recreated in the narrative and dramaturgy of the play.

It is not immediately apparent to audiences that *copla* songs offered a subversive tool of resistance to the Franco regime. American scholar Stephanie Sieburth talks about the enduring power of these songs.²⁷ A translation that could reproduce this power and the infatuation that Spanish audiences felt towards these songs needs to include some contextualisation of the realities people experienced at the time, whether of repression or a cultural attraction and identification with social, political, and sexual symbols of freedom. In this context, for dramatist Steve Gooch translating plays can only be an 'act of love' that relates to discovering in the original play some new and slightly exotic quality that the home audience should know about: 'like a love affair with a fascinating foreigner whom you feel compelled to introduce to your family' (Gooch 1996: 13). My challenge when translating *copla* songs is to assume the position of the foreigner and to present my cultural background to the new culture I am now immersed in. Effectively, in reverse of Gooch's process, I want international audiences to love *copla*, yet my question remains — how may I share my Spanish experience of *copla* and make non-Spanish audiences feel or understand it? This question prompted the development of a different show, *The Copla Cabaret*, in 2015, a follow-up iteration within my PaR process that revolved specifically

²⁶. Prior experiments presenting some *copla* songs in Anglo-speaking contexts are limited to Spanish stars like Lola Flores or Marifé de Triana who performed internationally in the USA in the 1970s and 1980s, but the songs would be performed in Spanish.

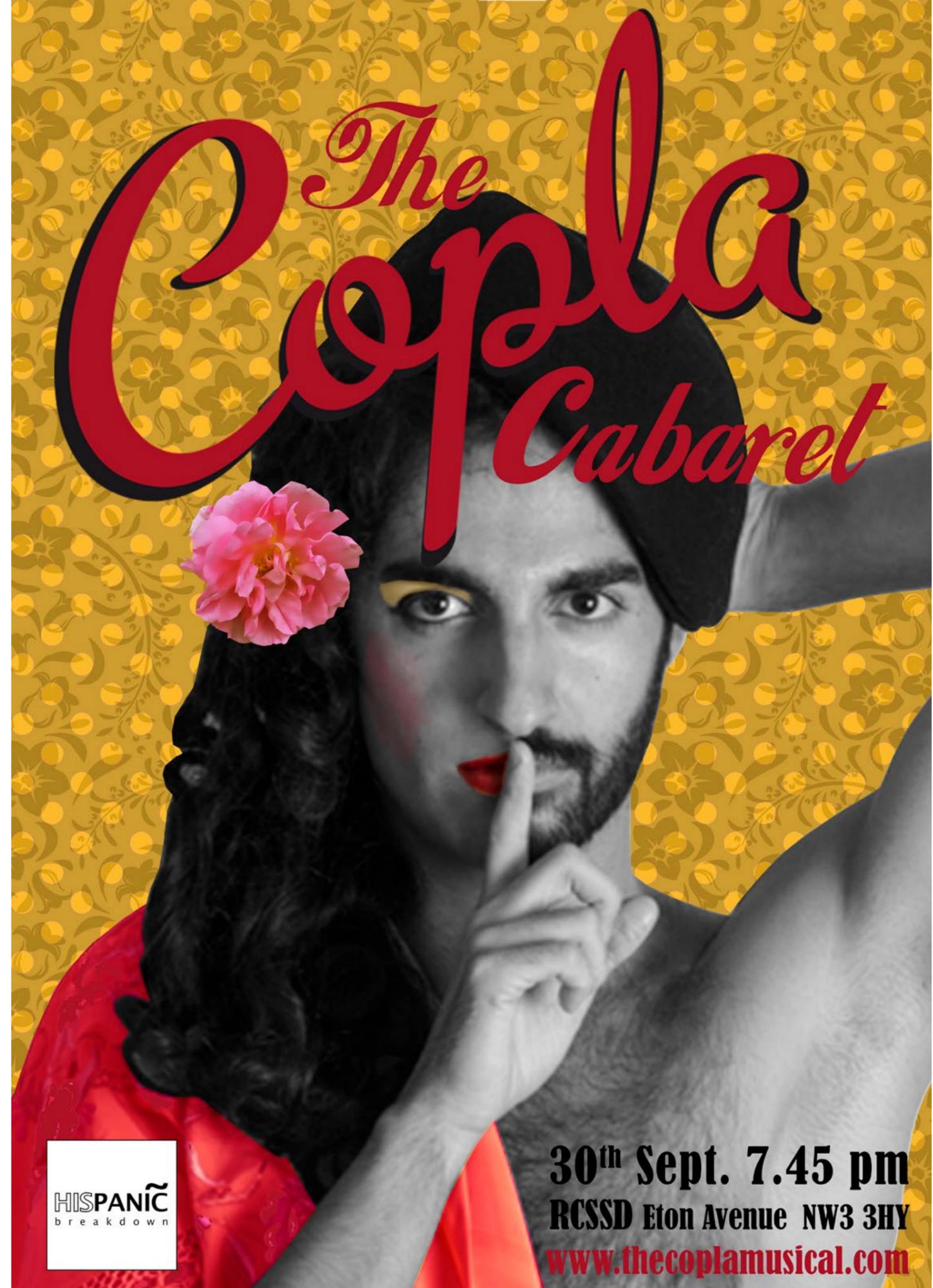
²⁷. In *Survival Songs: Conchita Piquer's coplas and Franco's regime of terror* (2014) Sieburth theorises on how *copla* songs helped people work through feelings of terror and grief in ways that were politically safe and emotionally manageable.

around the translation and presentation of *copla* to non-Spanish audiences in the style of an interactive cabaret. Gooch interestingly points out:

If you love a person, after all, you hate to see your view of them misrepresented or misunderstood – even if you yourself are blind to their worst qualities. ‘Faithful’ certainly can mean ‘objective’ in this context because the translator’s subjectivity necessarily stands behind his or her efforts. This is not simply a matter of how you view the foreign work, but also of the geographic, cultural and social limits through which your unconscious use of your home language has been formed (1996: 18).

Any translation is subjective and, as Gooch suggests, I want audiences to see what I regard as the best of *copla*. Within my subjectivity, I have chosen for the project some of my favourite songs that I found fitting alongside a newly written dramatic narrative through which, in turn, I have equally tried to enhance the songs. In addition, I have channelled the songs through a performative style in which my personal interpretation of them is even more present. All of this has been a labour of love, entirely personal and subjective but, as Venuti observes, legitimate and unique ‘in its own right’ (2012: 17).

Poster of *The Copla Cabaret*, 2015
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The Performance of English Copla

In his introductory article to *Stages of Translation*, Steve Gooch acknowledges that ‘actors can’t act what they can’t perceive, and if a translation doesn’t communicate directly, directors rarely have enough time to provide a compensating explication (always assuming they’ve seen the difficulty themselves)’ (1996: 13). Gooch’s faith in the actor and director seems limited and presumably he wishes them to not face the additional challenge of cultural translation. In *The Copla Musical*, however, both actors and directors exist at the core of the creative process, which in turn is fully dependant on their intercultural bond. Spanish and British performers bring distinct interpretative qualities into this project, given their various trainings and cultural influences. A performer’s adaptation to a foreign culture involves a gradual and organic transformation that reflects their growing cultural awareness. In a musical theatre project, an actor-singer’s performance normally becomes fuller and more animated, especially in the use of gesture, facial expressions, and diction, once they understand the musical and semantic subtexts at play. In the case of *The Copla Musical*, actors from English-speaking backgrounds were briefed on the characteristics and style of *copla* so that they could intellectually engage with the songs’ features and background. Nonetheless, I would argue that actors can only achieve deeper and more empowered performances of the songs when their understanding is embodied and not exclusively intellectual. In my experience, such embodied understanding amongst English-speaking actors has often been achieved by exploring a full rendering of the *copla* songs’ dramatic potential in relation to the structure of the overall story that is written in English. Songs in musical theatre often help storytelling through the expression of feeling. Similarly, in my work *copla* songs

have been translated into English with a strong dramatic purpose that in my view helps preserve the emotions that exist in their original lyrics.

However, what happens after translation, for example, to the Spanish performers facing the responsibility of singing these songs and telling a familiar story in a new and unfamiliar language? Violeta García has been a performer in *The Copla Musical* for many years. She used to sing Spanish *copla* professionally but in this project she has undergone a process of artistic self-discovery, reshaping her cultural understanding through the reinterpretation of *copla* in a new context.²⁸ The transmission of interpretation begins with the assimilation of technical knowledge that the performer learns and personalises. Spanish and British performers need to find their own way of handling these materials. Spanish actors need to perform the new English *copla* while preserving the implied emotions they identify in the original songs. Meanwhile, British performers find it helpful to know the original style and context of *copla* songs, however mimesis is not a useful tool in this intercultural process. In my experience, if actors apply their own cultural skills to singing English *copla* then they will probably develop more nuanced, textured, and compelling performances.²⁹ By approaching the text from their own cultural knowledge, British performers slowly build their awareness of the material’s original culture, which in turn brings them closer to the audience’s comprehension, expanding this circle of intercultural exchanges.

²⁸. ‘Singing *Copla* in English is weird, especially when being used to singing it in Spanish. In exploring how to find the best way of singing English *Copla*, I realised that the more I shaped the phrasing and articulation attending to the rules of English language, the closer I got to finding a new truth in this so particularly Spanish genre’ (Violeta García. Interviews with the cast of *The Copla Musical*, London: Roundhouse, 2013).

²⁹. A performance approach that is commonly encouraged in musical theatre is ‘to imbue songs with psychological realism, organically, delivering the lyrics as if they were a realistic passage of conventional prose [...] The theory behind this approach suggests that by treating the text as a monologue set to music, the actor will gain new insights into how and why the character might need to sing the thoughts’ (Bell 2012: 252).

Eugenio Barba defines inculturation as ‘the process of passive sensory-motor absorption of the daily behaviour of a given culture’ (1991: 219). A performer’s adaptation to a foreign culture involves a gradual and organic transformation, which is also a reflection of their growing cultural awareness. Ian Sanderson is a British actor who has been involved in *The Copla Musical* since 2011. By 2013 Ian had developed a stronger sense and understanding of *copla* through performing the songs in English that led him to a more visceral performance of these songs. Native English-speaking performers are thus modified through their contact with Spanish culture and are transported somewhere new and unusual yet specific. As Richard Schechner puts it:

Performing someone else's culture takes a knowledge, a “translation” that is different, more viscerally experiential, than translating a book. Intercultural exchange takes a teacher: someone who knows the body of performance of the culture being translated. The translator of the culture is not a mere agent, as a translator of words might be, but an actual culture-bearer (1991: 314).

In this sense a culture-bearer will facilitate the understanding of their culture through different practices of translation involving various languages, including musical and performative ones. *The Copla Musical* is full of culture-bearers and their function varies depending on their position within the project, starting with the author and performers from Spain who are familiar with the tradition of *copla* and ending with the lyricists, musical directors, and other collaborators who come from an Anglophone musical theatre background. Juxtaposed with the culture-bearers of the Spanish, British, and international artists involved in this project, there is a wide multicultural audience that completes the exchange. This exchange differs depending on each audience demographic. Whether the show is performed to non-Anglophone audiences potentially aware of any artistic parallels with *copla* or simply a cultural

understanding of other historically politicised musical forms, or whether audiences are first encountering this culturally-loaded form, we all complement each other.

This intercultural process positions the dynamics of the new English *copla* at the forefront, and encourages the cast and creative team work together to find out how it must be performed for each segment audience. In touring this project, we have experienced that it is not the same to perform *The Copla Musical* in Bolivia than in Bulgaria, or to perform it in Sitges to a mainly English expat community relocated in Spain, or to perform English *copla* to an entirely Spanish audience in Seville. My re-imagination of *copla* follows a method to re-engage with cultural codes that are put into perspective and need to be revised for each contemporary audience. This process has probed the notion of cultural sensitivity through the complex dialogue already inherent in collaborative performance. Through addressing cultural sensitivity, I have sought to render transparent the challenges — and some potential solutions — provoked by one of the central intercultural aims that I pursue in my work: maintaining cultural visibility on both sides of a cultural dialogue through a process of identifying cultural frames of reference. This discourse is mainly defined in terms of a target British audience, yet without erasing or flattening the Spanish source material and its culture. On the contrary, although speaking the language of Anglophone musical theatre, Spanish *copla* still manages to keep a visible identity, whilst translation into English allows *copla* to be presented in new international contexts. This intercultural experiment highlights new dynamics of collaboration and creativity and illuminates a way forward for intercultural musical theatre as a distinct form within the dominant Anglophone, West End-Broadway genus.



The Copla Musical, 2012, by Alejandro Postigo. Director: Sarah Johnson
Performers: Ian Sanderson, Alejandro Postigo, Spencer Irwin, Imanol Fuentes
© Camilla Greenwell

Conclusion

The Copla Musical originally aimed to produce a full-length musical that re-imagined and expanded *copla* beyond its Spanish context. During Franco's dictatorship between 1939 and 1975, *copla* represented a series of national-catholic values imposed by the fascist regime. This prompted dissident artists to defy censorship and explore powerful subtexts to relate to oppressed populations. This politicisation of *copla* diverted from its original entertainment and poetic purposes prior to the Spanish Civil War of 1936 to 1939, and paved the way to transform *copla* into a subversive tool of expression in democracy after 1975. In the political climate of the twenty-first century, these songs still register a new cultural significance in the realm of musical theatre as they enter in contact with other histories and identities. Further possibilities for identification with the melodramatic narratives and emotions embedded in *copla* lyrics become available inside and outside of Spain, whilst social links and ambiguities such as those experienced by homosexual groups silenced during the dictatorship can now be explored artistically through reinterpretations of the form's historical subtexts. These significant possibilities entirely depend on how *copla* is translated and presented into new cultural settings.

Throughout the development and multiple iterations of *The Copla Musical*, I have tried to facilitate a cultural connection that permits the readability and acceptance of *copla* as a cultural form that may contribute to the making of musical theatre in Anglo-dominant contexts. While doing this I have made equal efforts to maintain the songs' idiosyncrasies as informed by the historical matters that remain key to the identity of *copla*, calculating the balance between foreignisation and domestication within translation as discussed above. Throughout this process, I have challenged Venuti's notion of an 'illusion of transparency' since

our process of translating *copla* was overt and required an intercultural effort from adaptation to performance. This process involved actors and musicians as much as lyricists and dramaturges as they were all encouraged to reflect on their own experience of *copla* and bring their cultural knowledge and identities into the adaptation and performance of the art form. In selecting the songs and coordinating the adaptation process, I have safeguarded most of the songs' original contents yet at the same time I have ensured that *The Copla Musical* exists in its own context as a 'text in its own right'. In this way I have tried to navigate the potential violent effects of translation outlined by Venuti. However, it is my 'act of love' for *copla* that has empowered *The Copla Musical* to become my own contribution towards expressing this essential form across different cultural contexts.³⁰

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³⁰. For more information about *The Copla Musical*, please visit www.thecoplamusical.com

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