

‘What happened in Valencia in the eighties was a democratisation of the nightlife. Until then it had been the exclusive preserve of the bourgeoisie.’

Vicente Pizcueta, promoter and nightlife consultant

The intangible

The period from the late seventies to the early nineties saw an acceleration in Spanish popular culture. Especially in music, which went from classic songs (ballads, boleros...) to a feverish zapping of youth subcultures. Some were connected to the dominant values (see *The Movida* or indie), while others represented real challenges to the system (aided by increased access to technology). With exploding economic growth, the Spanish elite introduced aesthetic freedoms, but political dissent was repressed, as demonstrated by the police harassment of free radio stations, occupied social centres, Basque radical rock and television programmes with a Marxist message such as *La bola de cristal*. The more outgoing Valencian popular nightclubs were also criminalised.

1. The democratisation of the fiesta

The ‘Valencia sound’, later stigmatised by the label ‘*ruta del bakalao*’, was a widespread artistic and social experiment that anticipated the explosion of raves in England. Without question, we are speaking of the most avant-garde period of popular music in Spain. The thrust of the Valencia clubs died through overcrowding and police repression, but people continued to party in clubs on the outskirts of Barcelona (*mákina* music for the workers) and the increasingly trendy Ibiza (now turned into an example of the industrialisation of pleasure, catering for the tourism sector).

‘Barraca was a metaphor for all that could be aspired to in terms of leisure spaces at that time. A breakdown of boundaries resulting in the establishment of a totally classless *fiesta*. The mix of people – sometimes, totally disparate – became the hallmark. [...] Under the strobe lights, political commitment turned into a completely elusive collective individualism. Surely it was the only revolution to which a post-revolutionary generation could aspire.’

Joan M. Oleaque, journalist

2. Tales of the neighbourhood

The capacity of the cultural industry to virtually ostracise mass musical movements is surprising. It happened with punk, heavy and hard rock (the industry preferred *The Movida*), later with gypsy pop (condemned to the petrol station market) and, to a lesser extent, with hip-hop (which never took off commercially). Anyone wanting to know the daily life of the late twentieth century suburbs needs to hear these songs.

‘In Franco’s time, the two big problems were the Basque Country and Cornellá, which was the industrial heart of the Baix Llobregat. There were many large companies and organised strikes. [...] In Cornellá, the Civil Guard shot and killed people in the street. I was born between the *Satélite* and the wasteland. There were many gangs there – truly nasty gangs – that fought with chains. Many places still didn’t have electricity, and rape was commonplace. Cornellá was very dangerous, but as I was born there I knew how to weather the storm.’

Raf Pulido, Trapera del Río band

‘Bambino was one of the first kings of petrol-station tapes. Although at that time the emerging middle class ignored him, he was a huge hit with the brat-pack aristocracy and in the vast slums populated by migrants coming to the city from the countryside. Of course, these lower classes were the ones who shopped more often at petrol stations and markets. Los Chichos were born in that context and also did well on the petrol-station shelves. And with them their never-ending school. In the seventies, gypsy pop was somewhat equivalent to black music labels like Motown or Stax. It sold with some success and appealed to the general public, but was subject to a tacit cultural apartheid; by both the industry itself and the media.’

Luis Troquel, journalist

3. *The Movida*

It was an explosion of vitality, but above all the soundtrack of a country impatient to discover consumerism. You only need to listen to the number of songs listing commercial products (many sound indistinguishable from commercials). This also marked the arrival of the sexual revolution in our country, some twenty years late. Against this, the resistance from the conservative media could do nothing.

‘What happened in Madrid between 1980 and 1985 was not very different to what the youth of any time and place has always done: they dressed up, went clubbing, drinking, flirted, boasted of romantic conquests and gossiped. The big difference was the importance of the unifying influence of music (which, since the fifties, was only seen as a novelty in post-Franco Spain). The media’s enthusiasm for information also helped, they probably had nothing better to talk about. [...] With the exception of some cult sectors in Spanish-speaking countries, *The Movida* bands were unknown outside Spain. This is the most obvious failure of their alleged cosmopolitanism. ‘Rome, Berlin, New York,’ said the songs of the eighties. What did they contribute to music beyond the triumphalism and complacency of a mad moment in the history of our society?’

Patricia Godes, journalist

4. The rabble were right

Known as Basque *radikal* rock (RRV), this was an antiauthoritarian musical tide. Its social strength lay in connecting with struggles such as insubordination, the right to housing (*okupas* or squatters) and independent radio stations. At times – ‘Hotel Monbar’ or ‘Ustelkeria’ – it functioned as a means of disinformation about the complicity of the state in the so-called dirty war. For many young listeners, these songs were the first contact with unofficial versions of the political reality, not only in the Basque Country, but throughout Spain. In fact, the aspirations of RRV are largely reflected in the 15-M movement.

‘Basque *radikal* rock saw itself as the soundtrack to the revolution, but was more the background noise of the demobilisation. It was ultra political at a time that saw the beginning of the collapse of the leftist movements. It questioned the hegemonic consensus about what was acceptable politically and culturally. It became a space of resistance against what Guillem Martínez has called “the culture of the Transition”. It addressed, often with more rage than intelligence, matters about which no one spoke: Spanish nationalism, consumerism, the degradation of the working class neighbourhoods, police violence, sexism... The result was the systematic exclusion of RRV from the media. Groups that sold hundreds of thousands of records were completely invisible on television, radio or in the newspapers.’

César Rendueles, Professor of Sociology

5. The isolation of indie

The Spanish indie scene is the sound of uprooting. Especially in its early years, where bands and the alternative press were authentic photocopies of what happened in England or America. A commitment to melancholy and the lack of interest in connecting with the audience marked this musical movement, a hermetic version of the *Movida*. With the new century, and with a more engaged professionalism, the prestige of indie would skyrocket to the point of exerting the cultural hegemony it enjoys today.

‘In Spain, we were neither anti-Thatcherite nor anti-Reaganist, like the indie of the Anglophone world. It seemed that there was no problem here, but it was a fallacy. In fact there were lots of problems, and the response should have been like that of groups in other countries, such as The Housemartins. Spanish indie opted to stand apart from politics. Politics stank, and they saw no alternatives. That was a bitch because it was then that Spain initiated the economic policies the effects of which we are starting to feel now. Today people do protest; then we all lived comfortably disappointed.’

Nacho Vegas, musician

