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## JUNE 2019 | Matilde Salvador on her Centenary: Sensibility Made into Song

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From birth, Matilde Salvador i Segarra (Castellón de la Plana 23.3.1918 – Valencia 5.10.2007) was brought up in a very musical environment, which together with her natural talent and sensibility, resulted in her becoming one of the most individual voices of Spanish composition of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her father was a founder of the Castellón Conservatory, in which she studied and where she came to know the composer Vicente Asencio (1903-1979), who was first her teacher and later her husband.

A milestone in the career of this composer, the centenary of whose birth we celebrated last year, was the première of her opera *Vinatea* in 1974, which made her the first female composer to première an opera at the Teatro del Liceo in Barcelona. But this was not the first opera written by Matilde Salvador, who had already engaged with this genre in 1943 with the première in Castellón of *La filla del rei barbut*, which with *Vinatea* embraces stylistic feature of Valencian musical nationalism. Of the theatre the composer comments: "I love the theatre, deep down I am always creating theatre, I am theatrical, even when writing a song. I feel the pulse of dramatic expression."

Matilde Salvador was a prolific composer, the creator of a body of work as broad as it is varied. The ballet was one of her most important genres: *El segoviano esquivo* (1953), *Sortilegio de la luna* (1954), *Blancanieve* (1956), *El rossinyol i la rosa* (1958). But she also wrote choral, orchestral and incidental music, as well as music for piano, guitar and chamber orchestra. Among her best known works are the *Missa de Lledó* of 1967, and *Mujeres de Jerusalén*, commissioned by Radio Nacional de España in 1973.

In her work the voice has a special place with her very large production of songs, surely the field in which Matilde Salvador is at her most effective, thanks to her special gift for converting music and text into emotion. The composer herself gives us the following comment on her songs: "My first compositions were based on poems, I love setting words to music. I think the human voice cannot be compared with any other instrument. I feel attracted to the voice and I also love poetry, and the theatre. I have written very many songs, but I think 'Are my songs really songs?' Sometimes I think they are dramatic situations. Because they are never just an accompanied melody, however much I may believe in the melody". Her aesthetic position in the field of song is summarised thus: "I try to respect exactly and in detail the expression of the text, with a [melodic] line which is both serious and tonal".

The albeit serious and tonal line adopted by Matilde Salvador in her songs has the undoubted communicative power which, with the beauty of her harmonic textures and the very personal lyricism of her melodic lines makes her works for voice and piano one of the most important chapters of Spanish lyric song of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The words of the French composer Florent Schmitt (1870-1958) endorse this view of the songs of Matilde Salvador: "Personally I find them most original, admirably scored and with a deep and touching sense of emotion". Far from treading well worn paths, Matilde Salvador presents an undoubted originality in her songs, without abandoning a solid compositional structure which displays her mastery of harmony, together with the importance given to the melodic line. The musical language developed in her songs is far from expressing trite nationalism, while her sound judgement is again found in the perfect adaptation of the music to the poetic texts.

The composer tended to group her songs in cycles, hence the *Alba lírica*, a cycle based on anonymous poems and others by Bernat Artola completed in 1939, the first song of which was premièred by the great soprano Victoria de los Angeles in 1947. Also from 1939 are the *Seis canciones españolas*, settings of anonymous poems with others by Gil Vicente and Lope de Vega, a cycle dedicated to Manuel de Falla. She chose Juan Ramón Jiménez for the texts of *Arietes de primavera*, six short songs composed in 1948. A highlight of her oeuvre is the *Canciones de nana y de desvelo*, dating from 1948, based on poems by Carmen Conde. In this cycle the composer utilizes musical material reduced to essentials in order to communicate a highly refined sensibility. Carmen Conde is also the author of the four poem cycle *Cancionero de la enamorada*, completed in 1955.

Outstanding also is her *Homenaje a la poesía de América*, in which Matilde Salvador turns to four female poets from Latin America, Gabriela Mistral, Delmira Agustini, Alfonsina Storni and Juana de Ibarbourou, in order to give us an attractive and varied fresco of thirteen songs completed in 1956. Then in 1975 she published her ten *Cervantinas* based on texts by Miguel de Cervantes, another milestone in her song production this time commissioned by the Comisaría de la Música for the IV Jornadas Musicales Cervantinas.

The composer played an important role in premièring and performing at the piano her very wide song production with noted singers of her time such as Isabel Rey, Gloria Fabuel, Carmen Bustamente, Isabel Penagos, Manuela Muñoz and the prematurely deceased tenor José Ferrero.

In the recording field one should mention the excellent work of the label Columna Música, which has produced the songs of Matilde Salvador on three CDs: two monographs, *Voces de otra orilla* (1CM0166) with the soprano Isabel Monar, and *L'amor somniat* (1CM0299) with the tenor José Ferrero, also an anthology where I accompany mezzo-soprano Marta Knörr, *Canciones de compositoras españolas del siglo XX*, (1CM0138) a creative universe of poetry and music in which sensibility disposes of every artifice in order to express itself in song.

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