

---

**AMADEU CORBERA-JAUME**

Conservatori Superior de Música de les Illes Balears

Universidad Internacional de Valencia

<https://doi.org/10.56693/cr.164>

# CHOPIN UNDER THE SWAY OF GEORGE SAND: CONTROVERSIES SURROUNDING THE CHOPIN FESTIVAL IN MAJORCA (1930–1936)

Joan M. Thomàs i Sabater (Palma, Majorca, 1896–1966) was one of the most important Majorcan musicians of the twentieth century. More than as a composer or choir director, Thomàs stands out for having been a leading musical activist during the first third of the century, with a reformist and modernising agenda to culturally and artistically advance Majorcan society. In this regard, his most important achievements were founding the Capella Clàssica choir (1932) and establishing the Chopin Committee and the Chopin Festival (1930/31), to commemorate the Polish musician's stay on the island in the winter of 1838. Thomàs also hosted another distinguished composer, Manuel de Falla, who spent two years in Majorca, between 1932 and 1934.

However, Chopin and especially his companion on the trip to Majorca, the writer George Sand, were frowned upon in the early twentieth century by reactionaries who could not comprehend how a clergyman like Thomàs could promote such a celebration. This opposition would eventually lead to problems for Thomàs, on the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, when he found himself subjected to a purging process by the Francoist authorities.

This article presents the challenges faced by Joan M. Thomàs in his dual role as a clergyman and a modern musician in Majorca for having established the Chopin Committee, in the context of the controversy surrounding the visit made by Chopin and George Sand to Majorca. The reconstruction of this conflict has been made



Picture 1. Members of the Chopin Festival in 1934, with Joan M. Thomàs (fifth from the left), pianist Alfred Cortot (fourth from the right) and, on his left, General Francisco Franco. Source: Partituroteca UIB

- 1 E. V., 'Constitución del Comité Pro-Chopin en Majorca', *La Última Hora* (31 July 1931), 4–5.
- 2 Ginebra Olives Calbet, 'L'origen dels Festivals Chopin a Majorca: una activitat de "civilització" d'influència noucentista', *Revista Catalana de Musicologia*, 16 (2023), 153–182; Joaquim Rabaseda, 'Els primers festivals Chopin a Majorca (1931–1936)', *Lluc. Revista de cultura i d'idees*, 874 (2010), 32–34.
- 3 Isabel Graña, *Els poetes de l'Escola Mallorquina i l'Associació per la Cultura de Majorca* (Barcelona: Abadia de Montserrat, 2007).
- 4 Scott Messing, *Neoclassicism in Music. From the Genesis of the Concept through the Schoenberg/Stravinsky Polemic* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 1988); Ruth Piquer Sanclemente, *Clasicismo moderno, neoclasicismo y retornos en el pensamiento musical español (1915–1939)* (Sevilla: Doble, 2010).
- 5 Josep Murgades, 'El Noucentisme', in Jordi Castellanos and Jordi Marrugat (eds), *Història de la literatura catalana. Vol. VI. Literatura contemporània (II). Modernisme. Noucentisme. Avant-guardes* (Barcelona: Enciclopèdia Catalana, Editorial Barcino i Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2020), 386–427; Dominic Keown, 'Contemporary Catalan Culture', in Dominic Keown (ed.), *A Companion to Catalan Culture* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2011), 13–40.
- 6 Olives Calbet, 'L'origen', 165.
- 7 Rabaseda, 'Els primers festivals', 32.
- 8 Jim Samson, 'Extended forms: the ballades, scherzos and fantasies', in *The Cambridge Companion to Chopin*, ed. Jim Samson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 99–123.
- 9 Evelyn Ricci, 'George Sand et les Baléares: d'un amour contrarié à l'invention d'un imaginaire littéraire touristique', *Iberic@l. Revue d'études ibériques et ibéro-américaines*, 21 (2022), 13–25; Antoni Vives Riera, 'Literatura de viatges e indumentaria en Majorca: voz turística colonial y ventriloquia inversa regional (1837–71)', *Iberic@l. Revue d'études ibériques et ibéro-américaines*, 21 (2022), 27–44.

possible thanks to the documentation relating to Joan M. Thomàs kept in the Partituroteca of the University of the Balearic Islands – a library and archive dedicated exclusively to music collections, which houses all of the musician's personal and professional documentation.

## A Winter in Majorca

On 30 July 1930, the Chopin Committee in Majorca was officially established, with a solemn ceremony at the former Charterhouse in the town of Valldemossa.<sup>1</sup> The institution, driven and presided over by the musician Joan M. Thomàs, was founded to commemorate the figure of the Polish musician and his stay in Majorca between December 1838 and February 1839, with two explicit objectives: to organise the Chopin Music Festival, on an international scale and as a tourist attraction, and to create a museum devoted to Chopin and George Sand in the same Charterhouse where they stayed.<sup>2</sup>

Thomàs, who in addition to being a musician was also a priest, used to be part of the group known as the Escola Mallorquina: a circle of Majorcan intellectuals with a Catalanist and regionalist agenda.<sup>3</sup> Through the aesthetics and values of inter-war European neoclassicism<sup>4</sup> and its Catalan version, known as *Noucentisme*,<sup>5</sup> they promoted a reformist, regenerative and modernising programme for Majorca through intense civic and associative work and literary output. In this sense, the Committee and the Festival were part of this same agenda, a 'true tool for the "civilising" of the Majorcans'<sup>6</sup> within neoclassicist bounds.

As musicologist Joaquim Rabaseda points out, 'celebrating the music and figure of Chopin was not a modern trend or a universally accepted tendency in Europe in the 1930s',<sup>7</sup> and if the Polish musician was thus a controversial figure,<sup>8</sup> even more so was his stay with George Sand on the island of Majorca. It is known that the couple did not find the rest they desired on the island, being received with some hostility by a local population that, at the end of the first third of the nineteenth century, was far removed from the lifestyle and trends of Paris. The writer narrated the experience of that stay in her famous book *Un hiver à Majorque* (1841), written from a purely colonial standpoint<sup>9</sup> and in very derogatory terms about Majorcan society. She even referred to the Majorcans as 'monkeys' and compared

them to pigs, which provoked indignant responses from Majorcan intellectuals of her time<sup>10</sup> and later.

However, the criticisms of Sand had a strong patriarchal and misogynistic undertone; thus, in the first translation of the book into Spanish, published in 1902, Gabriel Alomar, one of the most important thinkers on the island at the turn of the century, who wrote the foreword, said of her, almost to excuse her, that ‘in Majorca, the adolescent educated in an aristocratic convent of the *ancien régime* predominated over the rustic girl from Nohant’.<sup>11</sup> However, Alomar pardoned Chopin, whom he saw rather as a weak man manipulated by Aurore Dupin, also under the same heteropatriarchal conception, where the apparently normative gender of the couple was therefore questioned, and this would suffice to explain their strange behaviour: ‘The masculine vigour that animated that 34-year-old woman communicated to her the fever of the upcoming struggles for the ideal, and contrasted with the feminine weakness of Chopin’.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, this questioning of the gender role of the Polish composer and his music was one of the elements that made him a controversial figure among European critics even at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.<sup>13</sup>

Alomar would later be one of the Majorcan intellectuals who supported the creation of the Committee. The list of personalities Thomàs managed to gather was impressive, starting with the Spanish head of state in 1930, King Alfonso XIII, and including the most important European musicians and musicologists of the moment: Edouard Ganche (president of the Chopin Society of Paris), Manuel de Falla, Ignacy Paderewski, Maurice Ravel, Wanda Landowska, Igor Stravinsky, Pau Casals, Mateusz Gliński, Arthur Rubinstein, Karol Szymanowski and Alfredo Casella, among many others.<sup>14</sup> Baltasar Samper, a Majorcan composer and committed Catalan republican activist, who was also among the Committee’s supporters, would write later from his Mexican exile that, thanks to



Picture 2. Joan M. Thomàs (centre right) accompanied by Alexander Tansman (extreme right) and Arthur Rubinstein (to his right), along with political authorities, at the Chopin–Sand Museum after Rubinstein’s performance. Source: *Philharmonia Chopiniana*, 10 (1932), 18.

10  
Antoni Ferrer, ‘George Sand, *Un hiver à Majorque* et ses deux auberges espagnoles’, *Cahiers d’études romanes. Revue du CAER*, 17 (2007), 361–403.

11  
Gabriel Alomar, ‘El viaje de George Sand en Majorca’, in George Sand, *Un invierno en Majorca* (Palma: José Tous, editor, 1932 [1902]), XXXIV.

12  
*Ibid.*, LV

13  
Jeffrey Kallberg, ‘The Harmony of the Tea Table: Gender and Ideology in the Piano Nocturne’, *Representations*, 39 (1992), 102–133.

14  
Joan Company i Florit, ‘Joan M. Thomàs’, in Joan Company i Florit, Pere Estelrich i Massutí and Joan Moll i Marquès (eds), *Tres músics mallorquins. Antoni Torrandell, Joan M. Thomàs, Antoni Matheu* (Palma: Conselleria d’Educació i Cultura del Govern Balear, 1985), 77–144.

that initiative, Thomàs had achieved a ‘reconciliation that, despite having been delayed for so long, has been no less timely’<sup>15</sup> between Majorca and Chopin and George Sand.

Despite this excellent presentation, the Committee did not escape criticism: specifically, from the Catalan canon Jaume Colell i Bansells, from the diocese of Vic. Colell (1846–1932) was one of the leading representatives of Catholic and traditionalist Catalan nationalism, ‘a reference for Catalan conservatives’<sup>16</sup> at the turn of the century, opposed to socially modernising movements such as *Noucentisme*. From the *Gazeta de Vich*, a publication he directed, Colell launched a strong diatribe against the fact that the memory of Chopin and especially George Sand was being commemorated, and he found it even more galling that it was a clergyman like himself who had taken the initiative. From the same misogynistic and heteropatriarchal perspective that Alomar had expressed, albeit more mildly, years earlier in his foreword, Colell aggressively condemned any attempt to pardon Aurore Dupin’s presence on the island and her supposed control over the Polish musician:

A group of Majorcans, let’s call them *intellectuals*, to use the trendy term, have set out to revive and honour the memory of Fryderyk Chopin, the composer who, having been very ill in his youth, spent the winter of 1837–38 on the Golden Isle. [...]

It seems incredible that an entire community presided over or epitomised by Reverend Thomàs would wish to evoke the memory of that *Winter in Majorca* during which a carefree and scandalous *virago*, who seemed to exercise a loving guardianship over the ailing youth, for months made the good people of Majorca feel the pestilential and perfumed breath of the cream of Parisian society [...] Apart from a collection of Chopin’s scores [...], we do not know what significant relic could be displayed in the planned Sand-Chopin Museum other than the *culottes* or undergarments worn by the woman called not *George* or *Sand*, but Aurore Dupin.<sup>17</sup>

Colell, fundamentally, shared the negative opinion about the modernist French writer expressed by the most reactionary elements of the Spanish Catholic Church from the late nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century: Aurore Dupin had been censured by the Jesuit Pablo Ladrón de Guevara, author of the popular book *Novelistas malos y buenos* (1909, reissued and expanded several times up to the time of the Spanish Civil War), where he classified writers based solely on their moral conduct.<sup>18</sup> Although he does not explicitly condemn *Un hiver à Majorque* (his book is only about novels), Ladrón de Guevara did speak badly of Dupin in terms similar to those of the canon of Vic: ‘Married, divorced, in bad company, unbelieving, irreligious, impious, socialist, persecutor of marriage, advocate of free love against all laws and against God Himself, very dishonest’.<sup>19</sup>

15  
Baltasar Samper, ‘Federico Chopin en Majorca’, *Las Españas. Revista literaria*, 13 (1949), 1 and 6.

16  
Benjamí Montserrat Satorre, ‘Premsa catalanista catòlica, mossèn Collell i La Veu del Montserrat’, *Cercles: revista d’història cultural*, 6 (2003), 172.

17  
Jaume Colell, ‘Chopin i Majorca’, *Gazeta de Vich*, 3771 (4 September 1930), 1.

18  
Caterina Riba and Carme Sanmartí, ‘La recepció de George Sand en España: traduccions y censura (1836–1975)’, *Quaderns: revista de traducció*, 27 (2020), 29–49.

19  
Pablo Ladrón de Guevara, *Novelistas malos y buenos. Segunda edición aumentada* (Bilbao: Vizcaina, 1911), 391.

Thomàs felt deeply offended by Jaume Colell's attack, especially since the canon had sent his article directly to the Bishop of Majorca before sending it to him. He wanted to exercise his right to reply with a written response in the pages of the *Gazeta*,<sup>20</sup> but received no answer from Colell.<sup>21</sup> In his article, Thomàs defended himself, denying any intention to establish a Chopin–George Sand Museum (as we will see, this was not entirely true); on the other hand, he exalted Chopin's return to faith in his final moments. The Majorcan musician cited the testimony collected by Franz Liszt,<sup>22</sup> when the Polish composer, on his deathbed, received the last sacraments from his friend *abbé* Aleksander Jełowicki just before dying, and exclaimed, '*Merci, merci mon cher! Grâce, à vous, je ne mourrai pas comme un cochon*'.

He even appealed to all possible means, including the Vatican's nuncio in Spain, Monsignor Federico Tedeschini,<sup>23</sup> in order to defend himself against the attack. In the end, he chose to send his reply to the Barcelona newspaper *El Matí*,<sup>24</sup> which had a Christian Democratic and Catalanist orientation. However, *El Matí* only published a very small part of his response, which did not allow Thomàs to defend himself as he wished. Perhaps because Chopin's un-Christian behaviour almost until the day of his death was uncomfortable even for *Noucentist* and modern Catholics like those *El Matí* aimed to represent,<sup>25</sup> the newspaper simply concluded the controversy in noncommittal terms: 'The foibles of poor Chopin, history remembers them because he was an eminent man. We couldn't approve of them, but, after his very Christian death, we couldn't hold them against him as an unforgivable fault'.<sup>26</sup>

The criticisms, however, did not affect the momentum of the Festival. Thus, the first edition was held on 16 and 17 May 1931, in Palma, just one month after the proclamation of the Spanish Republic: the Pau Casals Orchestra performed, directed by its founder, along with Baltasar Samper, Ernesto Halffter, Joan Lamote de Grignon and Alexander Tansman, and with the participation of pianists Alicia Halffter, Joan Gibert i Camins and Mieczysław Horszowski.<sup>27</sup> Despite unanimous praise from the Majorcan critics,<sup>28</sup> the public did not respond as expected: visitors were not attracted and the locals did not fill the venues.<sup>29</sup> Economically, therefore, that first edition was a failure, and the political change in Spain, and the fact that initially the Committee had the support of the Spanish monarchy, did not facilitate institutional support for the enterprise or guarantee its continuity.<sup>30</sup> This would be the trend of the Festival throughout the republican period: concerts of great artistic quality with uneven public success, economic problems and little official assistance. However, the project was interrupted by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War on 18 July 1936.

20  
Joan M. Thomàs, 'Chopin i Majorca. Lletres a Mossèn Colell' (19 September 1930) [manuscript]. Partituroteca UIB, arx. 28.

21  
Letter from Joan M. Thomàs to Jaume Colell (21 September 1930). Partituroteca UIB, arx. 28.

22  
Franz Liszt, *Frederic Chopin* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Haertel, 1879).

23  
Letter from Joan M. Thomàs to Federico Tedeschini (21 September 1930). Partituroteca UIB, arx. 28.

24  
Letter from Joan M. Thomàs to the editor of *El Matí* (21 September 1930). Partituroteca UIB, arx. 28.

25  
Francesc Canosa i Farran, 'L'esclat de la societat mediàtica a Catalunya. *El Matí*, un diari dels temps, un diari a contracorrent', *Diàlegs. Revista d'estudis polítics i socials*, 9 (31–32) (2006), 37–51; Maurici Serrahima, 'Notes sobre *El Matí*', *Els Marges*, 6 (1976), 111–119.

26  
N/A, 'Chopin i Majorca', *El Matí* (24 September 1930), 11.

27  
Programme of the Chopin Festival (16 and 17 May 1931). Partituroteca UIB, arx. 22.

28  
Olives Calbet, 'L'origen', 175.

29  
Estanislau Pallicer, 'Els concerts. Orquestra Pau Casals', *La Nostra Terra*, 41 (1931), 187–188.

30  
Rabaseda, 'Els primers festivals', 33–34.



## Chopin under Francoism

The war divided Spain into two sharply defined zones: the Republican, loyal to the legitimate government of the Republic, and the Nationalist, under the command of the insurgent faction, initially led by army generals and fascist organisations like the Falange Española, with explicit support from the Catholic Church. However, from October 1936 onwards, it would be under the sole control of General Francisco Franco. The Francoist regime would only finally come to an end with the death of the dictator, on 20 November 1975.

Majorca fell to the Nationalist side from the beginning, and immediately a very violent process of repression against all those who were militants or sympathisers of the Republican cause, Freemasonry, left-wing parties and organisations, or simply Catalan nationalists, began throughout the island. In this latter sense, Joan M. Thomàs, who in 1932 had founded a choir, the Capella Clàssica (which achieved great prestige throughout Spain<sup>31</sup>), and in 1935 had been appointed professor at the newly created Conservatori Regional de Música de les Balears,<sup>32</sup> despite being a priest, was also a 'liberal, avant-garde priest and critical artist',<sup>33</sup> and for this reason he was under suspicion from the new Francoist authorities. According to historian Josep Massot, in the first months of the war, Thomàs was half-hidden at his home 'because he was considered a Catalanist'<sup>34</sup> and even a 'left-wing and ardent propagandist for the British'.<sup>35</sup>

Thomàs had been one of the 153 signatories, in June 1936 (just a month before the outbreak of the war), of a manifesto prepared by Majorcan intellectuals in favour of cultural brotherhood between Majorca and Catalonia, titled *Resposta als catalans* ('Response to the Catalans').<sup>36</sup> This text, as its name indicates, was a 'response' to a previous manifesto drawn up by Catalan intellectuals and politicians, the *Missatge als mallorquins* ('Message to the Majorcans'),<sup>37</sup> which called for a national community among all Catalan-speaking territories, starting with Majorca. Both manifestos were published in the context of political euphoria prevailing in the spring of 1936 among progressive and Catalan nationalist camps, following the victory of left-wing and liberal coalitions of the Popular Front in the February elections. That triumph led to the restoration of Catalan self-government, after two years of suspension and the imprisonment of its leaders for having revolted against the right-wing and reactionary governments that had ruled the Republic since 1933.<sup>38</sup>

As already mentioned, the mere fact of having adhered to that manifesto made him suspicious, even after his public retraction in an article subscribed to by almost all the initial signatories published in September 1936.<sup>39</sup> Thus, in October, the new Francoist civil governor, Mateu Torres, established the first Comisión de

31  
Company, 'Joan M. Thomàs'.

32  
Arnau Reynés i Florit, 'Musical Outlook from the End of 19th Century Onwards in Majorca', *IN. Investigació i Innovació Educativa i Socioeducativa*, 3 (2012), 77–107.

33  
Company, 'Joan M. Thomàs', 110.

34  
Josep Massot i Muntaner, *El bisbe Josep Miralles i l'església de Majorca de la dictadura a la guerra civil* (Barcelona: Abadia de Montserrat, 1991), 177.

35  
Josep Massot i Muntaner, *El primer franquisme a Majorca: guerra civil, repressió, exili i represa cultural* (Barcelona: Abadia de Montserrat, 1996), 432.

36  
'Resposta als catalans', *La Publicitat*, 14 June 1936, 2.

37  
'Missatge als mallorquins', *La Humanitat*, 23 May 1936, 4.

38  
Agustí Colomines, 'Representing Catalan National Identity. Catalonia during the Spanish Second Republic and the Civil War', *Journal of Catalan Studies*, 11 (2008), 65–85; Josep Massot i Muntaner, *Cultura i vida a Majorca entre la guerra i la postguerra, 1930–1950* (Barcelona: Abadia de Montserrat, 1978).

39  
Massot i Muntaner, *Cultura*, 97–100.

Depuración, in order to purge all elements in the educational system opposed to the fascist regime, and Thomàs, as a professor at the Conservatory, was in the spotlight. That Commission was composed of Alfredo Llopart, Josep Oleza i d'Espanya, Gabriel Cortès, Bartomeu Bosch Sansó, Josep Enseñat Martínez and Antoni Villalonga Villalonga.<sup>40</sup>

The musician received a letter of accusation in early January 1937. Surprisingly, however, the charges against him at that time were not for having signed the Response, but for other matters related to his professional activity, especially concerning the Capella Clàssica (due to its regular use of modern Catalan in their concerts) and Chopin Festival.<sup>41</sup> Regarding the latter, the Commission accused him of the following:

Another reason for social and religious confusion is said gentleman, a leading initiator of the Chopin festival held in Valldemossa over recent years in collaboration with prominent Catalan nationalists and leftists; for although no one disputes the merits of the eminent musician, this festival reminds us of his scandalous stay in Majorca with the aforementioned artist Madame Dudevant (George Sand), who especially scandalised the inhabitants of the town and the capital in irregular company with the aforementioned musician, dressing as a man and committing acts of notorious disrespect for religion. Authoritative voices have highlighted these extremes, which Mr Thomàs could not have ignored.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, once again, as it had been for Jaume Colell years earlier, and with the same arguments, for Spanish fascism the main problem of recalling Chopin's stay in Majorca seemed to be the company of Aurore Dupin, since, as Caterina Riba and Carme Santmartí aptly note, 'Sand embodied everything that the regime condemned',<sup>43</sup> absolutely contrary to the values of Francoist National Catholicism that were just beginning to be implemented. For the Commission, just as for the canon of Vic, the fact that it was a clergyman who promoted the celebration of that Festival to recall Chopin and George Sand's winter in Majorca was even more problematic and a 'reason for confusion'.

As for the other accusation, about the 'prominent Catalan nationalists and leftists' who had collaborated with the Festival or with the Committee, the Commission was undoubtedly referring to the aforementioned writer and socialist politician Gabriel Alomar, and to musicians like Pau Casals and Baltasar Samper, also known for their Catalan nationalist and republican militancy, Adolfo Salazar and Òscar Esplà, who were part of the National Music Board of the Republican government, or Otto Mayer, a prominent Marxist music critic of German origins and a disciple of Hans Eisler, who had fled to Barcelona from Nazi Germany.<sup>44</sup> All of them had appeared in the different performance programmes,<sup>45</sup> and

---

40  
Santiago Miró, *Maestros depurados en Baleares durante la Guerra Civil* (Palma: Lleonard Mun-taner, 1998).

---

41  
The complete accusation can be read in Santiago Miró's book, 34–39.

---

42  
Charges against Joan M. Thomàs (January 1937). Partituroteca UIB, arx. 34..

---

43  
Riba and Santmartí, *La recepció*, 37.

---

44  
Diego Alonso Tomàs, 'El pensamiento estético y político de Otto Mayer-Serra y su relación con el ideario de Hanns Eisler', in Daniela Fugellie, Ulrike Mühlischlegel, Matthias Pasdzierny and Christina Richter-Ibáñez (eds), *Trayectorias. Music between Latin America and Europe 1945–1970. Música entre América Latina y Europa 1945–1970* (Berlin: Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 2019), 149–154.

---

45  
Company, 'Joan M. Thomàs'.



at the beginning of the war they had clearly and notably aligned themselves with the Republican side. In addition, in the last edition of the Festival, held in June 1936, Thomàs and Samper had been warmly received by the mayor of Palma, Emili Darder, leader of the Majorcan Republican left, who would be executed by the fascists on 24 February 1937.<sup>46</sup> But alongside these names, individuals sympathetic to or aligned with fascism in 1937 had also joined the Committee when it was instituted, such as Majorcan writers Llorenç Ribet, Antoni Salvà and Nicolau Brondo (founder of the Falange in the Balearic Islands), and musicians like Alfredo Casella, who during those years was fully committed to Mussolini's regime in Italy.<sup>47</sup>

Thomàs prepared a lengthy response, which he delivered on 19 January 1937, brilliantly defending himself against all the charges. Regarding the accusations about the Committee and the Chopin Festival, he rebutted them as follows:

that the Festival of the Comité Pro Chopin (whose first President was in 1930 the Excmo. Sr Count of Peralada, by express delegation of the King) has been held with the exclusive collaboration of great national and foreign artists, of whose 'leftism' or 'Catalan nationalism' the undersigned has no knowledge whatsoever.

that, since the aforementioned year of 1930, the concerts and festivals of the Committee have been presided over by constituted Authorities [...] leftists such as the late Civil Governor Mr Manent [...], and also rightists such as the Most Excellent Mr General Franco, from whom the undersigned has received, on more than one occasion, both in the Cartuja de Valldemosa and in the Palacio de la Almudaina, expressive signs of approval and praise without the slightest visible sign of any confusion.<sup>48</sup>

Indeed, General Francisco Franco, who by 1937 was already chief of the rebel faction – as the war was still ongoing – had been the Military Commander of the Balearic Islands between 1933 and 1935, and had presided over some Festival events. Therefore, the persecution by the Commission was completely absurd if the same Dictator and supreme leader of Spanish fascism had been photographed with Joan M. Thomàs and Festival artists.

Even though this was more than sufficient, the musician did not want to miss the opportunity to defend himself and, incidentally, ridicule the Commission's stupid accusations about a lack of Christian behaviour on the part of Chopin and himself. As he had already rebutted Jaume Colell's arguments years before, he continued:

3) that the Chopin Festival has always been limited to exalting and commemorating 'the merits of the eminent musician' without ever mentioning, not even once, in the programmes and official documents of the Committee the name of the undesirable lady depicted in such

<sup>46</sup>  
'El maestro Samper, en la alcaldía'. *La Almudaina*, 14 June 1936. 4.

<sup>47</sup>  
John C. G. Waterhouse and Virgilio Bernardoni, 'Casella, Alfredo', *Grove Music Online* (2001).

<sup>48</sup>  
Response of Joan M. Thomàs (19 January 1937). Partituroteca UIB, arx. 34.

graphic terms in the charges, and burying in Christian, charitable and natural oblivion the moral lapses in the life of a great artist who, if subject to human weaknesses, like so many Catholics and non-Catholics less brilliant but no purer than him, ended his existence with an exemplary death worthy of a saint.<sup>49</sup>

Thomas, however, was somewhat misleading about George Sand, because the truth is that from the early days of the Committee's foundation, the figure of the French writer had been present. Without going any further, the musician promised Aurore Sand, the writer's granddaughter, that in the museum planned for the Festival, there would be space for the memory of her grandmother.<sup>50</sup> Sand was a friend of the painter Bartomeu Ferrà, owner of cell number 2 at the Charterhouse, and his wife Aina Maria Boutroux. All three finally promoted, in 1932, the creation of a Museum of Chopin and George Sand in the same cell, 'by delegation of the Chopin Committee', as indicated in the press,<sup>51</sup> thus fulfilling the objective that the Committee had set for itself at its inception, as we have already mentioned. This museum also had its own board of trustees, chaired by Aurore Sand, and included members who were also part of the Chopin Committee, such as musicians Alexander Tansman, Josep Balaguer and Baltasar Samper, and the painter Pere Barceló.<sup>52</sup>

On the other hand, this Museum was only made possible after the impetus provided by the Committee and the Festival and the positive reinterpretation of Chopin and George Sand's trip to Majorca promoted by Joan M. Thomàs and other intellectuals of the Escola Mallorquina. Therefore, while Thomàs did not directly participate in the promotion or management of the Museum, this initiative undoubtedly fell within the set of activities promoted around the Committee of which he was certainly aware.

Thomàs closed his defence by recalling that he had already been accused of causing 'confusion' 'by a Catalan nationalist newspaper from Vic' and had subsequently obtained all the necessary permissions and approvals from the Bishop of Majorca and the Vatican's nuncio in Spain. With very subtle mocking irony, he ended his letter by thanking the members of the Commission:

Imploring the Lord that, enlightened by His divine grace, all our earthly and transitory confusions may be dispelled, may He reward us one day by delivering us from that eternal dark confusion suffered far from the perpetual light of Glory: IN TE DOMINE SPERAVI, NON CONFUNDA IN AETERNUM, AMEN. [In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed, amen]<sup>53</sup>

However, all of this was not sufficient. The Commission, lacking arguments against Joan M. Thomàs's excellent defence, expanded their case, now accusing him of 'having shown sympathies for

49  
Ibid.

50  
Letter from Aurore Sand to Joan M. Thomàs (21 April 1929). Partituroteca UIB, arx. 5.

51  
'Asamblea de entidades de turismo', *Correo de Majorca* (24 June 1932), 8.

52  
'La celda de Chopin', *El Día: periódico de la mañana* (20 May 1932), 3. The other members of this board were North American pianists George Copeland and Guy Maier, Polish poet Witold Hulewicz, Austrian painter Erwin Hubert, composer Felix Labunski, British and French consuls W. Ivan Lake and Luis Mongin, art critic Jean Robiquet, writers James Webb, Alfons Maseras and Joan Estelrich, lawyer and poet Francisco Blanes Viale, doctor Miquel Sureda i Blanes, and left-wing politicians Lluís Nicolau d'Oliver and Antoni M. Sbert. Additionally mentioned are two individuals whom we cannot identify, Melcior Oliver and Madame Clementel.

53  
Response of Joan M. Thomàs (19 January 1937). Partituroteca UIB, arx. 34..

the Catalan nationalist party'<sup>54</sup> by signing the famous manifesto *Resposta als catalans*, an argument that had not been used in the first charge document.

Thomàs had to prepare a defence again, but this time more directly, against specific members of the Commission. Thus, against the 'confusionism' he was accused of for being a priest and having directed the Capella Clàssica and the Chopin Festival, the musician countered that one of the members of the Commission – the Latin professor Bartomeu Bosch Sansó – was also a priest. Regarding the accusation of having used the modern Catalan language in the programmes and performances of the Capella, and that this alone meant he was a Catalan nationalist, Joan M. Thomàs defended himself with the following strong argument:

Let us now suppose, Your Excellency, that in any of these programmes, the undersigned had included professions of faith such as the following: 'The first and perhaps the only voice, alone and firm, that rose IN DEFENSE OF OUR CATALAN IDENTITY, was mine. This is an incontrovertible truth.'

I ask: What charge would the gentlemen of the Inspection Commission have made against me? [...] Well, I have not signed such statements [...]. The one who literally signed them in the *Correo de Majorca* of 31 July 1930, front page, column 5, was ONE OF THE MEMBERS OF THE INSPECTION COMMISSION who had no scruples in sending me the aforementioned document.<sup>55</sup>

He refers to the lawyer, playwright and columnist Gabriel Cortès i Cortès, a member of the Purging Commission and a former councillor for the right-wing parties in the Municipal Council of Palma, who during the Republic publicly identified himself as a 'conservative Catalan nationalist'.<sup>56</sup> It is within this context that, as Thomàs recalled, he published an article in the local newspaper *Correo de Majorca* with the exact mentioned sentence.<sup>57</sup>

In mid-April 1937, a new commission was formed, directly dependent on the provisional government of Franco that had been established in Burgos at the beginning of the war, while Madrid remained in the hands of Republican forces and the government of the Republic had moved to Valencia in November 1936.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, the civil governor of the Balearic Islands, Mateu Torres, who had promoted the creation of the first commission on his own initiative, was relieved of his position and sent to Seville with new responsibilities.<sup>59</sup> Only one member of the old commission became part of the new one, the priest Bartomeu Bosch, as president; the other members were Lluís Mestras, Josep Ramis d'Ayreflor, Rafael d'Ysasi Ransomé and Gabriel Morell Font.<sup>60</sup>

The new commission reiterated accusations against Thomàs for having signed the *Response to the Catalans*,<sup>61</sup> and as Josep Massot states, he was eventually transferred, although it does not specify

54 'Ampliación del plazo de respuesta' (6 April 1937). Partituroteca UIB, arx. 34.

55 Response of de Joan M. Thomàs (13 April 1937). Partituroteca UIB, arx. 34.

56 Antoni Nadal, *Teatre modern a Majorca* (Barcelona: Abadia de Montserrat, 1998), 51.

57 Gabriel Cortès, 'Una vegada al mes. Resposta a l'amic Joan Pons i Marquès', *Correo de Majorca* (31 July 1930), 1–2.

58 Miró, *Maestros*, 24–25.

59 Josep Massot i Muntaner, *Aspectes de la guerra civil a les Illes Balears* (Barcelona: Abadia de Montserrat, 2002), 119–120.

60 Miró, *Maestros*, 26–27. Mestras resigned in July, and in May 1938 he was arrested by the Francoists themselves. In June 1939, Gabriel Morell also resigned due to relocation, and he was replaced by another member of the previous committee, Gabriel Cortès.

61 'Cargos contra Juan M. Thomàs y Sabater' (22 April 1937). Partituroteca UIB, arx. 34.

where.<sup>62</sup> In any case, the punishment must not have been very severe, because in 1939, immediately after the war ended, the Capella Clàssica and its director were invited to perform at the state funeral of the fascist leader José Antonio Primo de Rivera,<sup>63</sup> who had been executed by the Republican army in the early months of the conflict. In 1948, Thomàs was appointed a member of the Spanish Institute of Musicology<sup>64</sup> founded by another priest and musicologist, Higiní Anglès, within the Francoist institution Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, and he continued to teach at the Conservatory, of which he was appointed director in 1960, until his death in 1966.<sup>65</sup>

### *Ensalada de la Comissió*

Clearly, throughout this time, Joan M. Thomàs felt not only persecuted but also insulted by the absurdities of the accusations against him, and by those who made them: individuals of low intellectual level, highly reactionary and generally lacking in culture, whom he deeply scorned. Therefore, perhaps to alleviate the frustration of finding himself in this position, he composed two music-inspired ‘works’ that he left handwritten among the papers he kept from the entire process: *Romanç d’en Pèl de Judes* [Ballad of Judas hair], and *Ensalada de la Comissió* [‘Ensalada’ of the Commission].<sup>66</sup>

These are two texts in Majorcan dialectal Catalan, handwritten (the ballad in pencil, *Ensalada* in ink) without any music or indication of how they should be sung or accompanied by melody. They are purely a musical-literary jest that Thomàs wished to leave for posterity, with a very direct mockery of some members of the first Commission – the one that made the most ridiculous accusations about Chopin and George Sand.

The *Romanç d’en Pèl de Judes* or ‘Ballad of Judas Hair’ is, as its name indicates, a ballad that imitates the traditional form, with ABBA or ABAB quatrains. It almost certainly speaks of the Commission’s spokesman and secretary Alfredo Llompart, whom Thomàs, because of his hair colour, derogatorily calls ‘Judas Hair’, with all the negative connotations of referring to the treacherous apostle. The text refers to some controversies that Llompart had when he was a councillor of the Municipal Council of Palma, as well as his lamentable role in purging the education system.

The *Ensalada de la Comissió* refers to the type of musical ‘quodlibet’ typical of sixteenth-century Spain, with a clear theatrical intention: a mixture of texts, languages, styles and musical themes on a common topic – like a ‘salad’ – which served as courtly entertainment.<sup>67</sup> This exercise is more complex than the *Ballad*, and with some small musical indications, which means that Thomàs, even if half in jest, worked on it a little more. The protagonists

---

62

Josep Massot i Muntaner, *Tres escriptors davant la Guerra Civil*. Georges Bernanos, Joan Estelrich, Llorenç Villalonga (Barcelona: Abadia de Montserrat, 1998), 247.

---

63

Company, ‘Joan M. Thomàs’, 110.

---

64

*Ibidem*, 83.

---

65

Xavier del Hoyo Bernat, ‘Entrevista amb Pilar Irazábal’, in *Conservatori. 70 anys d’ensenyament musical* (Palma: Institut d’Estudis Baleàrics, 2006), 43–47.

---

66

*Romanç d’en Pèl de Judes* and *Ensalada de la Comissió*. Partituroteca UIB, arx. 34.

---

67

Maricarmen Gómez, ‘The “Ensalada” and the Origins of the Lyric Theater in Spain’, *Comparative Drama*, 28 (3) (1994), 367–93; Maricarmen Gómez, ‘Ensalada’, *Grove Music Online* (2001).

Original [fragments]	English version
Es romanç d'en Pèl de Judes sa padrina em va contà ai quina po, padrineta, ai quina po que em fa.	The ballad of Judas Hair, my grandmother told me, oh, what fear, grandmother, oh, what fear it gives me.
'Pèl de Judes li posaren p'es colò d'es seu cabei i diuen que el batiaren amb aigo i sofre vermei. [...]	They called him Judas Hair for the colour of his hair and they say they baptised him with water and vermillion. [...]
Era en temps de Dictadura i ell sol va armar tal embui que por mor d'una Capella s'Ajuntament fer ui [...]	It was during the Dictatorship and he alone caused such commotion that because of a Capella the Town Council had to hide. [...]
Per això quan el mal Torres el va fer 'depurador' a esquerra i dreta amb cent porres pegà a tothom 'sens temor'	That's why when the evil Torres made him 'purger' to the left and right with a hundred batons he beat everyone without fear.
En va demanar justícia cent mestres atropellats no els escoltà l'estultícia d'aquell ase desfermat.	He demanded justice for a hundred trampled teachers but they didn't listen to the foolishness of that mad donkey.
A tots dos los engigaren per una ordre des Govern però entre tots dos deixaren Majorca feta un infern.	They caught them both by order of the Government but between the two of them they left Majorca turned into hell.

Table 1. Text of the *Ballad of Judas Hair*

of the 'play' are Mateu Torres as 'Toad Head' (baritone), Alfredo Llompart, again 'Judas Hair' (tenor), and the playwright and lawyer Gabriel Cortès, a 'little angel' (soprano). A choir of men and a choir of women also 'sing'. The text is, like Baroque ensaladas, a mixture of languages, in this case Catalan, Spanish and Latin, with a very sharp humorous tone.

Despite having to go through an absurd process of purging with even more absurd accusations, Joan M. Thomàs managed quite well and even with humour, and within a few years he regained the prestige he had achieved as a musician before the war. However, he never felt comfortable under Francoism, and even in the early 1950s he explored the possibility of emigrating to Mexico, with the help of his friend Baltasar Samper, who had travelled there in 1942.<sup>68</sup>

68  
Amadeu Corbera,  
'Baltasar Samper, entre  
dues aigües: l'art i el  
compromís', doctoral  
thesis, Universitat de  
les Illes Balears, Palma,  
2023, 408.

Original [fragments]	English version
<p>[...]</p> <p><b>Petit cor:</b> Ecce la Comissió de los borricos que ha de depurar los catedraticos. (Ecce, Ecce, Ecce, etc.)</p> <p><b>Dones:</b> Ai, quina por, Pepeta! Ai quina por que em fa aquesta genteta!</p> <p><b>Tots:</b> Kyrie eleyson</p> <p><b>Solo Baríton (o Baix?):</b> Yo soy ‘Cabeza de Sapo.’ Vaig ésser governador, por ruin y bellaco me dieron la dimissió</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Me llamaban ‘pomme de terre’ más con mucha impropiedad porque mai una patata tanta gent ha intoxicat.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p><b>Homes:</b> Hypocrates, Galenus veniat, veniat.</p> <p><b>Solo Tenor:</b> Ara surt jo: ‘Pèl de Judas’ estadista sin igual, nieto del Conde de España, o quissà del ‘Comte Mal’.</p> <p>Abrenuncio galicisms del moderno catalán; peccatum confussionismus de Chupín y Jorge Sand.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p><b>Solo sopran:</b> Pel cel vola un angelet que en el món fou congregante autor d’un drama o sainet ca... ca... catalanizante</p> <p>Fue el primer que defendió nostra catalanitat quan nadie en contra salió d’aquesta gran veritat.</p>	<p>[...]</p> <p><b>Small choir:</b> Behold the Commission of the donkeys that must purify the professors. (Behold, Behold, Behold, etc.)</p> <p><b>Women:</b> Oh, what fear, Pepeta! Oh, what fear this little people instils in me!</p> <p><b>All:</b> Kyrie eleison</p> <p><b>Solo Baritone (or Bass?):</b> I am ‘Toad Head’. I was governor, for wicked and villainous conduct they sacked me</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>They called me ‘pomme de terre’ but very improperly because never has a potato poisoned so many people.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p><b>Men:</b> Hypocrates, Galenus veniat, veniat</p> <p><b>Solo Tenor:</b> Now I emerge: ‘Judas Hair’ peerless statesman, grandson of the Conde de España, or perhaps of the ‘Comte Mal’.</p> <p>They expunge Gallicisms from modern Catalan; peccatum confussionismus of Chopin and George Sand.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p><b>Solo Soprano:</b> Through the sky flies a little angel who in the world was a congregant author of a Ca... Ca... Catalanising drama or farce</p> <p>He was the first to defend our Catalanity when no one attacked this great truth.</p>

Table 2. Text of the *Ensalada of the Commission*



The complications this could have entailed, his age and the onset of Parkinson's disease shortly thereafter prevented him from leaving, and he died in Palma in 1966.

## Conclusions

Fryderyk Chopin was not, as we discussed earlier, a consensus musical figure at the beginning of the twentieth century. In Majorca, the controversy over his trip with George Sand in the distant winter of 1838 still lingered, along with the criticisms against Majorcan society that the French author had written in her famous book *Un hiver à Majorque* (1841). In this sense, the establishment of the Chopin Committee, promoted by Joan M. Thomàs and the modernising intellectuals of the Escola Mallorquina in 1930, marked, as Baltasar Samper wrote, the 'reconciliation' between the island and the couple, especially the Polish composer.

However, Chopin and his association with George Sand remained problematic for conservative and reactionary Catalan and Spanish elements, who saw the Pole, from a clearly misogynistic and heteropatriarchal perspective, like other critics of the time, as a weak and 'effeminate' man manipulated by the writer. Thomàs, who was also a priest, had to face strong criticism for this fact. The stigmatisation of Aurore Dupin as the embodiment of the evils of modernity, and even socialism, and Chopin's un-Christian conduct posed a political problem for Thomàs when, at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, he was subjected to a public purging process by the Francoist authorities.

Thus in the midst of the rise of fascism in Spain, Chopin was discussed not just musically or in relation to the concept of gender heteronormativity, but also for his political suitability in the context of Majorca, linked to the condemnation that the Catholic Church and conservative elements had made of his companion, and where the controversy surrounding their trip to the island a hundred years earlier still stirred.

Thomàs proved to be very adept at navigating these criticisms and emerged largely unscathed, although the Committee was dissolved and the Festival would not be held again until 1981.

---

#### ABSTRACT

The musician and priest Joan M. Thomàs i Sabater (1896–1966) was the promoter of the Chopin Music Festival launched in Majorca in 1931, coinciding with the establishment of the Spanish Republic, to commemorate the Polish musician's stay on the island during the winter of 1838/39. The event was part of the modernist and Catalanist regeneration programme that, in line with the changing tides in Spain, propelled the intellectualism of Majorca at the time, with the aim of projecting their idea of a modern and European Majorca capable of attracting new visitors. However, the initiative sparked some opposition from conservative Catholics, who did not view favourably Chopin's rather non-religious figure and his companion on that trip, the writer Aurore Dupin, known as George Sand, questioning why it should be a priest who wished to remember them.

Despite the musical success of the Festival during the years of the Republic, controversy resurfaced at the beginning of the Civil War, when Thomàs, then a professor at the Conservatori de Música de Majorca, underwent Francoist purging. Among other accusations, he was charged with wanting to commemorate the journey of Chopin and Dupin and their extramarital relationship. The figures of the pianist and – especially – the writer were seen by the most reactionary elements of the new regime as contrary to the moral values and misogyny of Spanish fascism, and therefore Chopin, in this context, did not deserve to be celebrated.

---

#### KEYWORDS

Fascism, modernism, Catalanism, Majorca.

---

#### BIOGRAPHY

Amadeu Corbera Jaume, (b. Bunyola, Majorca, 1985). Graduated in Ethnomusicology from the Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya (ESMUC), holds a Masters in Musicology and Musical Education from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) and a PhD in Contemporary History from the Universitat de les Illes Balears (UIB). He is currently a lecturer in ethnomusicology, organology and history of music at the Conservatori Superior de Música de les Illes Balears (CSMIB) and a collaborator on the Master's Degree Course in Interpretation and Musical Research at the Universidad Internacional de Valencia (VIU).

His works focus, on one hand, on the oral music tradition of the Balearic Islands, urban music and pop in the context of Balearic tourism, and on ecomusicology and applied ethnomusicology; on the other hand, he studies musical neoclassicism in Catalan-speaking lands and the Catalan musical exile during the Spanish Civil War.