

## The Galician fiddle style

*Alfonso Franco Vázquez*

Excerpted from:

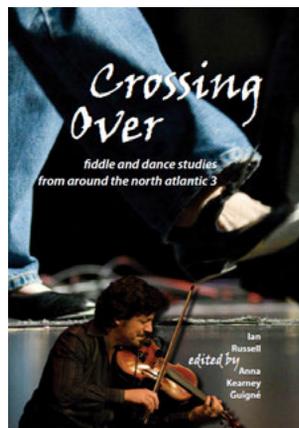
### Crossing Over

Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic 3

*Edited by Ian Russell and Anna Kearney Guigné*

First published in 2010 by The Elphinstone  
Institute, University of Aberdeen, MacRobert  
Building, King's College, Aberdeen, AB24 5UA

ISBN 0-9545682-6-5



About the author:

**Alfonso Franco Vázquez** has a professional degree in the violin and has undertaken doctoral studies in traditional Galician music at the University of Santiago de Compostela. He is a teacher of the fiddle in the Folk Music Conservatory of Vigo 'e-Trad', and is responsible for the string section of the folk orchestra 'Sondeseu'.

Copyright © 2010 the Elphinstone Institute and the contributors

While copyright in the volume as a whole is vested in the Elphinstone Institute, copyright in individual contributions remains with the contributors. The moral rights of the contributors to be identified as the authors of their work have been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.



## The Galician fiddle style

ALFONSO FRANCO VÁZQUEZ

In providing an overview of such a specific music style as the Galician fiddle, it is important to include a brief introduction to the history of the country itself in order to understand the origins of this music, which has incorporated throughout the centuries the influences of significant events, as usually happens in traditional genres. In this case, we are dealing with a repertoire passed on from one generation to the next by blind fiddlers/ballad singers which remained almost unchanged until the beginning of the twentieth century, when new rhythms brought from overseas by returning emigrants were incorporated. Out of this the old fiddlers created and maintained a vernacular dance music tradition until the second half of the last century, before new generations of fiddlers took up the instrument with the coming of the modern folk music revival.

### Introduction

On the western periphery of Europe, and at the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula facing the Atlantic Ocean, lies the country of Galicia. Its coast, where we can find the continent's highest cliffs, is also characterized by the *rías* (or large estuaries), where the sea, indenting inland, flows by fishing villages and fine beaches. Fishing, agriculture, and cattle-raising are the main sources of income. Green valleys and meadows, next to fast flowing rivers and surrounded by mountains, are outstanding features of this country where, until the beginning of the twentieth century, ninety percent of Galician population lived in a rural environment.

The ancient city Santiago de Compostela is the administrative capital of Galicia. Other important cities include La Coruña, Vigo, and Pontevedra on the coast, and Lugo and Ourense inland. Throughout the rural area of Galicia, the distance between towns is not great. The Galician culture is the result of the fusion between diverse cultures whose origins date from the Bronze Age. There are numerous remains of Celtic settlements spread all over Galicia, most of which are still hidden under the earth. The Celtic civilization thrived until the arrival of the Romans, who conquered Galicia for its rich mineral reserves. With the passing of time, it became a

province of the Roman Empire called 'Gallaecia', but never really lost its own culture and traditions.

At the beginning of the fifth century, with the fall of the Roman Empire, Galicia was invaded by Germanic tribes, and the Suebi took over. This was a northern Germanic people who, before the arrival of the Visigoths in the Iberian Peninsula, had already occupied the North West, establishing a relatively stable monarchy. It was at this point that a primitive Galician kingdom including not only Galicia itself, but also the whole of northern Portugal, came into existence; it was an area in which the Suebi easily adapted to the customs and traditions of the native people.

After the Islamic Moors' invasion in the eighth century (711 ce), there followed a long era in the Spanish history in which, during eight centuries, the northern Christian kingdoms progressively re-conquered Arab-occupied territories. This process came to an end in 1492, with the retrieval of the kingdom of Granada.

One very important historical point in the history of Galicia was the discovery of the tomb of Saint James the Apostle in the place named, henceforward, Santiago de Compostela (literally Saint James in the Field of the Star).<sup>1</sup> Santiago became a religious pilgrimage centre. Since then from all over Europe people would travel along the Way of Saint James, a pathway which became a cultural highway and along which Romanic art and the lyrics of troubadours would spread. The fact that Santiago became a religious centre contributed to the preservation of its cultural identity against the centralism of Castile. This pilgrimage route was thus an important way for European culture to spread through Galicia, but it also served to cause the remains of Celtic Galicia to fade.

The sea is an essential part of the spirit of the Galician people; the Atlantic Ocean often being present in the lyrics of the troubadours, who enjoyed great fame and success between the end of the twelfth century and the beginning of the fourteenth century in the north west of the peninsula. Johán de Cangas, Mendiño, and Martín Codax, troubadours from the *ria* of Vigo, sang in praise of the ocean under the patronage of the exultant Santiago de Compostela court. This is a period of Galician history in which we find such prestigious figures as Archbishop Gelmirez or Master Mateo – the sculptor of the Pórtico da Gloria, (lit. the Portico of Glory). The discovery of America in 1492, the location of Galicia on the North West coast of the peninsula, and the importance of Galician emigration to South American countries during the last two centuries are of such historical importance that they must also be taken into account.

### **Influences**

This brief historical introduction serves as a starting point to understand the principal influences which have inspired and formed the traditional music of the north west of the Iberian Peninsula.

The music of the Galician people is the fruit of a mixture of very diverse cultures and includes connections with other Celtic countries and regions, including Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, Brittany, and Ireland. Also, bonds with northern Portugal

are self evident, as much for the language, which is very similar to Galician, as for the music and typical traditional instruments. Both cultures have a wide range of percussion instruments and bagpipes.

The north west of the peninsula shows the result of multiple pre-Roman, Greco-Roman, and Germanic influences, which approached Galicia from all sides, by sea and over land. Although the Moors did not remain in Galicia in a permanent sense, throughout the duration of their occupation in Spain there was contact, and Arab and Mediterranean influences crept in through the centre and South of the country. In addition, Jewish settlements are easily recognizable in towns around Galicia, where Jews remained until their expulsion in the times of the so-called Catholic Monarchs (Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon) around the middle of the sixteenth century.

Contact with other European countries was, for the most part through the Way of Saint James. Referring to the pilgrims travelling to Santiago de Compostela, Pablo Briones writes:

Nearly everyone eventually arrives at the end of their pilgrimage, the Portico of the Glory, awaited by twenty-four elderly musicians carved from stone and playing fiddles, trumpets, psalteries, violas [...] and the organistrum, the predecessor of the hurdy-gurdy, which presides over the keystone of the arch of the musicians and was the favoured instrument of the blind storyteller-singers who would travel along the pathway [...] The songs which they sang were of great spontaneity and reflect, without doubt, the atmosphere of that era. As the pilgrims came and went, they also would bring their own personal songs and these would have been incorporated into the repertoire of traditional Galician music.<sup>2</sup>

The great number of pilgrims coming from so many different countries, and singing their own songs, contributed to create a favourable atmosphere for the development of every kind of music; either lyrics sung by the troubadours and collected in *cancioneros* (song books) or aurally transmitted folk music, which is the focus of this paper.<sup>3</sup> A. López Ferreiro in *Historia de la Santa A. M. Iglesia de Santiago de Compostela* describes this atmosphere and the influence of the pilgrims on the popular music of Galicia.<sup>4</sup> And he describes, based on the *Codex Calixtinus*, how pilgrims performed their arrival rites by celebrating in the cathedral that night.

It gives a deep and pleasing impression to see the choirs of pilgrims around St James's altar. The Germans stand along one side, the French along another, and they are all gathered in groups with lit candles in their hands. [...] Each one celebrates with his countrymen singing religious canticles to the sound of zithers, lyres, tympani, flutes, syrinxes, shawms, harps, viols, British or Gallic roues, psalteries or other instruments.<sup>5</sup>

Later on, referring to the feasts and the continuous celebrations in the cathedral – ‘with such diverse gathering of people from unknown parts and with all those extremely varied musics, hymns and songs sometimes performed in different languages’ – López Ferreiro highlights the great importance of ‘this pilgrimage singing and making the airs and hymns of so many and such distant nations resound under the vaults of the basilica of Compostela’, which in his opinion left an influence on many Galician musical forms.<sup>6</sup> He also gathered the names of many troubadours of the period and mentions the most important *Cancioneros* and their authors, stressing the influence which Santiago may have had on them.<sup>7</sup>

Galicia is well known for the number of emigrants who travelled to Latin America, especially Argentina, Cuba, and Venezuela. On their return, Galicians brought back with them the richness of the music of these cultures and this introduction of styles and rhythms from the New World provided an essential part of what makes up today’s traditional music in Galicia, including dances such as the rumba and songs such as *Habaneras* and *Corridos*.<sup>8</sup>

### **Traditional music in Galicia**

If one had to choose an instrument that best represented the traditional music of Galicia it would have to be percussion and, to be more precise, a small tambourine called the *pandeireta*. As an accompaniment to the voice, the *pandeireta* together with scallop shells, larger cymbal-less tambourines (*pandeiro*), side drums, or a wooden equivalent of the Irish bones, among others, have been employed, mostly by women, and have always been an effective way of livening up local celebrations and traditional festivals.<sup>9</sup>

The Galician *gaita*, a bagpipe with two or three drones, has always been the emblem of Galician music and through it Galicia has become well known in other countries. Traditionally the pipes are played alone or as a duo with clarinet or another bagpipe but not, until the end of the twentieth century, were large groups of pipers formed. The *requinta* is a wooden flute similar to that of the Irish but with a higher register, and, due to its shrill tone, it is ideal to be played along with the pipes. The diatonic accordion was incorporated into traditional music at the end of the nineteenth century largely replacing pipes, fiddles, and hurdy-gurdies for its completeness as an instrument and its capacity to accompany itself.

The hurdy-gurdy has followed a similar path to the fiddle. After becoming one of the most highly respected instruments of the palaces and courts, it became the lowest – the instrument of the vagabonds and beggars. Just when it was at the point of disappearing, around the middle of the last century, Faustino Santalices gave this instrument the recognition that it deserved and now the hurdy-gurdy is widely played and enjoyed throughout Galicia.<sup>10</sup>

### **The ancient fiddle in Galicia**

The fiddle in Galicia, in comparison to other European countries, is not an instrument widely found in families passing from father to son. Nor was it the main instrument

in carrying the tune in popular dances, where the tambourine and the songs would be the life and soul of the party. For the most part, the fiddle was played by characters that fulfilled a fundamental role in society (mostly in rural life, but also in larger villages): the blind singers of *coplas*.<sup>11</sup> D. Caseiro and C. Castro describe the lives of these blind musicians:

In past times the blind lived in miserable conditions and extreme oppression. In the middle ages some organizations were formed to help them, but during hundreds of years their only way of surviving would be by begging or reciting prayers, and a small handful of them in certain handicrafts. Oral tradition bears witness to the attitude with which these people were subjected through explicit sayings, such as '*Cegos, pegas e choias, dou ao diaño esta tres xoias*' (the blind, magpies and crows, three jewels I send to the devil). Some blind men became professional travelling musicians, walking dust roads and being led and guided by their family or the local people. When they had no family members to accompany them the locals would take them to the nearest village or town where another person would then take care of them. They would travel from door to door earning a little here and there: stopping in each place for two or three days, playing a few pieces of music in return for a crust of bread and sometimes travelling with a donkey which would carry their load.<sup>12</sup>

Caseiro and Castro outline the social role played by these blind musicians:

Blessed with extraordinary memories, they would carry an extensive repertoire of pieces which varied according to the talent and sensitivity of each individual. Without books or newspapers, without radio or television, they were the only chroniclers of the rural world. Their songs included accounts of the everyday rural life. The melody of the music would be formed around the lyrics because the message, the text that was to be conveyed, was of most importance. Some consider these songs, and those sung by muleteers, to be derived, with small modifications, from ancestral *alalás*, a form of free-rhythm song which is the most authentic and beautiful sung Galician music, expressing emotions and melancholy.<sup>13</sup>

These fiddlers, as well as the hurdy-gurdy players, had a key role in carrying around news and crime stories. At a time in which the central media of communication available in cities was limited to the newspaper, and of a limited use for a mostly illiterate population, story-telling singing blind men were highly valued, despite belonging to the lowest stratum of society, in many cases making a living by begging. In addition to this function of spreading news, they were also a link in the transmission of the oral tradition. Most of them learned to play the fiddle at a very young age, being in many cases blind from birth or as a result of diseases during their childhood. Usually, they were instructed by another blind person from a neighbouring area, who took them and taught them so that they could earn their living with music. Once their training was considered complete, the young fiddlers

began working, normally with the help of a guide, often a relative, who helped them and sometimes accompanied them on percussion (see Figure 1). This pattern is found in the lives of most of the fiddlers about whom information was available when preparing this paper.



**Figure 1** Dolores Gómez: 'Blind' of Paredo and her husband.

*Photograph by Bene Castroverde, 1874/1971*

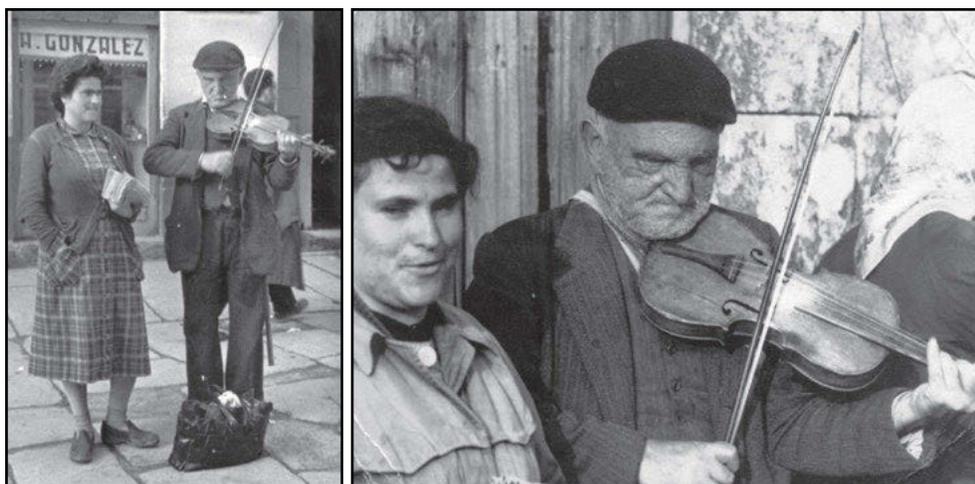
Each fiddler had an area of work, extending over their shire and the neighbouring ones, but they would also travel longer distances to fairs and open-air festivals, establishing routes and staying away from their homes for weeks. Normally, they stayed overnight in the area where they performed, lodging in the house of a local family or, sometimes, in the stable with the cattle.

These blind musicians, who in some cases only pretended to be so, sang at road crossings and other places where people gathered, such as the gates of churches. Sometimes they went from house to house offering their music in exchange for money or food. As earlier noted, they were frequently seen at the Holy Gate of the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. Pablo Briones describes them and their activities as follows:

The musicians and blind singers, who mostly were humble homeless waifs, lived in intense solitude and followed the fashions and tastes of those that travelled the pathway and those who enjoyed their recitations in the town squares and castles. Even in the low moments of the pilgrimage, they continued loyally performing to the call of the Apostle; we see them beside the Holy Gate in Jubilee years singing their 'cantigas' and ballads.<sup>14</sup>

They were also very popular for their ability to improvise a series of quatrains referring to a member of the audience, after being informed of details of the latter's

life by someone else. The same melody could be used for different lyrics, as it was the text that mattered. In order to illustrate the events told, some of the blind musicians' guides, or *moinantes*, displayed a large piece of cardboard or fabric, called *maltrañas*, with pictures of the story. While the fiddler played and sang, the assistant pointed at each of the successive scenes with a long stick. After the performance was finished, a cap was passed around to collect money from the audience. The use of a cardboard or sheet with pictures, which could be considered a sort of a primitive comic strip, continued until the musicians found a more effective system, thanks to the printing press. By the end of the nineteenth century, they began ordering copies of their songs from local printers, which they would sell, thereby increasing their income.<sup>15</sup> The lyrics were usually commissioned from poets, who wrote the songs after the musicians told them the story they wanted to narrate. Later on, the local printer provided them items they could sell for a living (see Figures 2 and 3).



**Figures 2 and 3** Antonio Lexide: 'Blind' of Viloalle with his daughter, Sabina, who is selling printed lyrics. *Moncho Garcia Collection, Mondoñedo, 1895/1976*

These printed lyrics became very popular, and people bought those they liked the most in order to remember them and sing them later at local feasts and other traditional events where singing was common, or at communal gatherings for flax threshing or spinning. The copies were made on the lowest-grade coloured paper, in order to keep the costs as low as possible, and they included a picture and a large headline at the beginning, comparable to those in newspapers. Spelling mistakes were common, as were errors in metrics, but this kind of literature has, nevertheless, a special charm of its own. Many of these printed copies, sometimes bound with a piece of string, have been preserved, and collections have been published which allow us to read the dramatic events of the past recorded in this 'folk newspaper library'. They are interesting and valuable, not only from an ethnographic point of view, but also, for instance, they help us to see the similarities between what

people wanted to hear in the nineteenth century and what we can find in prime-time television shows nowadays.<sup>16</sup>

Although, as earlier noted, most of these musicians were instructed by an older blind fiddler, in certain cases, particularly in areas around the main cities, some were sent to the music school to learn the basics of the instrument. Classical technique was probably abandoned very soon by the fiddlers, who had to adapt their repertoire to the tastes of their audience. This way, if asked to play for dancing accompanied by percussion instruments, they would have to exert a greater pressure on the bow, with the resulting harsher sound. Apart from that, as they often used the fiddle to back up their voice, some rested it on their chest instead of holding it between their chin and their shoulder, thereby leaving the head free to sing and make gestures more easily.

The non-tempered intonation used when singing, typical of some traditional songs, and described by Dorothe Schubarth as archaic, forces the singer to use a non-standard scale, in order to adapt to the voice, resulting in a deviation from 'academically correct' norms.<sup>17</sup> This can be heard in her recordings of Florencio dos Vilares, which accompanies volume VI of her songbook.<sup>18</sup>

The musical aesthetics were immersed in a rural environment where singing and the bagpipes had a privileged place, and the fiddlers had to adapt their technique to the ornaments and grace notes of the pipes and the melodic cadences of the singers. Although, unfortunately, no recording of a traditional fiddler playing together with other musicians has been preserved, we can assume that, as they often performed accompanied by tambourines and other traditional percussion instruments, they incorporated into their technique those bowings which best suited the rhythmic cadence of the accompaniment.

In recent years the Galician multi-instrumentalist, Pancho Álvarez, has played a pivotal role in reviving the traditional music of the blind fiddlers of Galicia. He focused on the last of the traditional fiddlers, Florencio dos Vilares, and included some of the tunes which had made him so famous in his district including 'A filla de Bartolo', 'A gaita de Cristobo', and 'Tres casamentos nun día'. For this project, Álvarez carried out thorough research on Florencio's life and work, and he strived to imitate his characteristic playing.

Álvarez demonstrates that in some cases the vibrato was fast and energetic, and the use of a vibrato trill of less than a half-tone was common. Between phrases in the song, in order to take some time and remember the lyrics of the next verse, he shows how they frequently played rolls and extended trills. His solo CD compilation *Pancho Álvarez: Florencio, O Cego dos Vilares*, draws on the music of Florencio dos Vilares. In the liner notes of this CD, Xosé Luís Rivas, a musician from Galicia recalls his memories of the blind musicians whom he saw perform many years ago:

I dealed [*sic*] with some blinds [blind men] that have practiced [*sic*] singing in fairs and pilgrimages, and I learned to appreciate their 'castrapo' (a jumble of Spanish and Galician words), their bare poetry, although deep and full of popular understanding, the other culture, the other life, and

above all, the melodies, the semi-guttural songs, the art of attracting and keeping the attention of the people who sang and played the violin, with their grace notes and mordents with Baroque scent, of exhibition, the spreading of famous events, the exaggeration of the lyrics.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to singing and playing, these remarkable characters also had to amuse their audience, and they incorporated into their melodies all kinds of sound effects. With their fiddle, they simulated cock crows, donkey brays, dog barks, the creaking of a badly-greased cart axle, and other locally-familiar sounds. Moreover, they illustrated by these means the different situations they were singing about, with sighs, moans, and other humorous vocalizations, thus getting more attention to the plot of the story.

### **Repertoire of the blind fiddlers**

The songs performed by the blind musicians included many different kinds of stories: events in neighbouring villages, lovers' fights, historical ballads, and injustices. As dramatic and gruesome stories were much appreciated, they spoke of murders and other crimes with a high dose of morbid fascination, much in the style of some of today's modern television dramas and news. As Xosé Luís Rivas and Baldomero Iglesias observe:

They narrate, with enviable skill, sexual and extreme aggressions, crimes of passion, lives of people sentenced to death, famous events, incests, love stories, adventures, stories of prisoners, miracles, stories of saints (who are often addressed and asked for forgiveness at the beginning), legends, rumours, stories about priests and housekeepers, feats of courageous men and women, fantastic tales, local stories full of realism and caricatures of famous and remarkable characters.<sup>20</sup>

The repertoire of the blind musicians was quite varied. In addition to the above mentioned songs and stories, they also performed traditional dances, such as *muiñeiras* or *jotas*, and *agarrados*, that is, tunes used to dance cheek to cheek, such as *pasodobles*, mazurkas or waltzes. They regularly incorporated such dances as tangos, rumbas, foxtrots, and *cumbias*, brought by returned immigrants from overseas. All kinds of melodies could be played, and no aesthetical preconception made them reject any tune. Well into the twentieth century, military service, the Civil War, and the railway increased people's mobility, such that melodies were constantly brought from other parts of Spain, leading to a cultural exchange between the different areas. As a result, the fiddlers' repertoires included many songs in Spanish. Later in the century, due to the presence of the radio in the homes, and to the strong competition from modern dance bands, traditional open-air dances became less common. Along with this, work opportunities for fiddlers and hurdy-gurdy players disappeared. In this context, fiddlers turned to playing various tunes they learned from the radio

or from modern bands, and they could be frequently heard performing Spanish light music, such as *cuplés*, in a desperate attempt to keep afloat in an unequal battle against modernity.

### The legacy of the blind fiddlers of Galicia

As I discuss below, such efforts to both preserve and revive this music, emerged out of a rediscovery of Galician traditional music in the 1970s and 1980s. This rediscovery, although linked to both the North American and European folk revivals, was born avoiding any connection with the political folk movement promoted by Franco's government.

Although the Galician blind fiddlers no longer perform, not since the 1970s, through the efforts of Pancho Álvarez and other Galician musicians, their music has been at the heart of the Galician folk revival movement. Through this recent interest, a small sample of their music has appeared in Galician song books. *Cancionero musical de Galicia de Casto Sampedro Folgar*, published in 1982, contains a number of tunes and songs originally performed by the blind musicians.<sup>21</sup> These include,



**Figure 4** Florencio López: 'Blind' of Vilares. *Vasquez Collection, A Fonsagrada, 1914/1986*

among others, twelve romance songs, two songs the blind musicians would perform at the Holy Gate of the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, as well as four songs in dialogue and seventeen blind songs. Torner and Bal y Gay's collection<sup>22</sup> contains nineteen additional blind songs. Schubarth and Santamarina's *Cancioneiro Popular Galego*, includes several songs and recordings from the blind fiddler Florencio (1914–1986, see Figure 4), who came from the little village of Vilares.<sup>23</sup> Florencio del Vilares provided key information about the blind fiddlers' style. There are only a few testimonies about how the blind fiddlers played. Florencio was interviewed by Pablo Quintana,<sup>24</sup> Xosé Luís Rivas and Baldomero Iglesias,<sup>25</sup> and Dorothe Schubarth,<sup>26</sup> as well as by Galician Television. José Díaz Pin, a neighbour, recorded one hour of Florencio with his domestic camera.

In an interview with Christian Moll of *Folkworld* in 1998, Pancho Álvarez commented:

This blind guy – Florencio – was the last one, and it is the only one that they have recorded. There were lots of blind musicians on the fairs, but this was the only one they have recorded. So it's the only reference we have. The style of the fiddle – it sounds in our ears a bit Arabic, a bit like in Eastern Europe. It's very

wild, it's a bit like when you listen to the travellers in England and Scotland; it's very fiery. When Sean Keane of the Chieftains listened to the recording of Florencio it reminded him of the old style in Clare.<sup>27</sup>

As far as publicly available audio recordings are concerned, we only know, so far, of those of Florencio dos Vilares, Eladio de Alxide, and Andrés da Revolta. A CD devoted to Florencio released by Pablo Quintana in the *Recolleita* series is the only record of an old traditional fiddler published to date. Apart from that, two of the tune books have companion recordings: musicologist Dorothé Schubarth's and the two volumes of Luís Rivas and Baldomero Iglesias.<sup>28</sup>

Some recordings exist by classical violinists. Among them, we can highlight those by Manuel Quiroga of Pontevedra (1899–1988). Quiroga recorded such traditional tunes as 'Alborada', and 'Muiñeira', which he adapted himself in a style similar to that of the great master Pablo Sarasate, who, incidentally, also had a famous composition based on a traditional *muiñeira* from Monterrei.

### **The revival of traditional fiddle music**

The origins of modern Galician folk music (as opposed to the rural tradition) can be traced back to the 1970s. During the late 1960s and 1970s many other cultures, including Britain, the United States, and Canada, were similarly searching for their musical roots. This interest in traditional music arose at the same time as General Francisco Franco's dictatorship crumbled, following his death in 1975. Franco had come to power in 1939, just prior to the commencement of World War II and during his long regime, he tried in vain to unify the folklore of the Spanish State. There was a policy to emphasize common cultural characteristics and eradicate all aspects of cultural manifestations which could be taken to symbolize the identity of a particular region. For example, as *jotas* could be found throughout Spain, they came to be adopted as a national Spanish dance. Galician traditional gatherings called *fiadeiros*, where it was customary to sing and dance, all but disappeared due to the pressure of the clergy and restrictions imposed by the government on meetings at night. Fortunately, Galicia was a very mountainous land with poor roads, such that these mandates did not reach the most remote rural areas, which remained shielded, and so it was possible to preserve examples of this archaic music. As elsewhere in the country, Galicia reacted against all things Spanish, such that, when the dictatorship gave way to the current constitutional monarchy, Galician musicians looked for something to set them apart from the rest of Spain, and they found it in the old Celticism already in vogue in the late nineteenth century and in the first third of the twentieth century. Galician musicians turned their attentions to such countries as Ireland, and Brittany who were in the midst of their own folk revivals.<sup>29</sup>

Galician musicians found parallels with their own music. Two of them, Rodrigo Romaní and Antón Seoane, were enthusiasts for the instruments and sounds of the Middle Ages. They made it their mission to track down hurdy-gurdies, *citolas*, and *freixolés* and to find those who made and owned these instruments. As a result of

their work, the record *Milladoiro* was released in 1978.<sup>30</sup> Galician musicians perceived many things in common with musicians in other European regions: the 'Celtic' origins, a green and rainy landscape, an economy based on agriculture and fishing, and a music which Galicians insisted on finding very similar to their own. In this way, and, moreover, noting that *muiñeiras* resembled Irish jigs and that our repertoire also included numerous polkas, we decided at that time that we were as Celtic as the Albert Uderzo and René Goscinny cartoon characters, Asterix and Obelix, and we blindly surrendered to the mythical King Breogán. While enthusiastically embracing Celticism, musicians purposefully rejected *jotas*, rumbas, fandangos, *foliadas*, and other local material which reminded them of Franco's Spanish regime. From our musical heritage, only polkas, *pasacorredoiras*, *muiñeiras*, guild dances, *alboradas*, and *alalás* were used, and re-interpreted within the new Celtic universe. Interestingly, all these dances have a binary or duple rhythm, except for *alalás*, which are free-rhythm songs, and all triple time tunes were left out. One exception is the band Fuxan os Ventos from Lugo,<sup>31</sup> who used music obtained from old musicians during collecting trips (the so-called '*recolleitas*') and included some *foliadas* in their first recordings; due to their proximity to rural music, this band kept outside mainstream Celticism.

### **Present day folk fiddlers in Galicia**

The presence of the fiddle in this first stage of the modern Galician folk music revival was quite limited.<sup>32</sup> In 1979, the pioneering folk band *Milladoiro*, released *A Galicia de Maeloc*. It featured a fine violinist called Laura Quintillán.<sup>33</sup> In 1984, the band Na Lúa arrived on the folk scene and we find what we consider to be the first genuine modern fiddler striving for a folk performing style.<sup>34</sup> Together with Pancho Álvarez mentioned above, the other great fiddler of the late twentieth century is Quim Farinha, who has performed with the bands *Fia na Roca*<sup>35</sup> and *Dhais*. Since 1997, he has also played in *Berrogüetto*, together with Anxo Pintos, a great multi-instrumentalist and master of Galician hurdy-gurdy.<sup>36</sup> Javier Cedrón was the fiddler in the band *Luar na Lubre*,<sup>37</sup> and he has also taken part as a fiddler in *Nova Galega de Danza*,<sup>38</sup> a contemporary dance project based on traditional music. Harry C. is the current fiddler in *Milladoiro*, his only band, a position he has held since 1999, after the departure of classical violinist Antonio Seijo.

Most of the present-day Galician fiddlers are based in the South. Since 1996, the fiddle has been taught at the Traditional Music School of Vigo (now called e-Trad).<sup>39</sup> In the beginning, it was taught by Quim Farinha, but he left in 1998 and was replaced by the current teacher and author of this paper, Alfonso Franco. This pioneering school specializes in the teaching of traditional and folk music in this country and it has become the principal institution for the preservation, dissemination, and performance of Galician music. It has links with many of the most influential Galician artists.

As a result of classes for music ensembles in this school, in 2001 an orchestra was created with traditional and folk instruments. After the success of their initial performances, this orchestra, *Sondeseu*, has become increasingly established.<sup>40</sup> The

group has toured in Ireland, Portugal, and France, and has played in major venues in Spain. They have released three records so far and are often asked to play in special shows on television. Sondeseu is backed by a Foundation of the same name, which is the promoter of the future Vigo-based European Network of Folk Orchestras. Sondeseu's fiddle section is directed by the author, and includes or has included among its ranks an important part of the new generation of Galician fiddlers, such as Vigo-born and self-taught Begoña Riobó,<sup>41</sup> for several years a member of Carlos Núñez's band, with which she has performed all over the world and whose 2004 live DVD showcases her talent.

Alfonso Merino<sup>42</sup> is a young fiddler who began playing folk music at an early age. He is a founder member of Bulla Timpánica and also of the band of the harper, Roi Casal.<sup>43</sup> He and Begoña Riobó are currently the principal young musicians playing in the Galician style. Together with other fiddle students, these are some of the musicians linked to e-Trad who, with their different musical projects, will, over the next few years, make the Galician fiddle internationally known as a unique style honouring the legacy of the blind fiddlers of our country.

The Galician fiddle was on the brink of disappearing. Florencio from Vilares was the last representative of the old fiddlers, but fortunately he lived long enough to connect with a new generation of musicians, though much remains to be done. The number of fiddlers in Galicia is only about fifty, and professionals do not exceed a dozen. However, the presence of the instrument is increasing: the main folk bands and soloists include fiddlers; they are now common in pub sessions and, what is more important, playing *jotas*, *muiñeiras*, *pasodobles*, and *rumbas*, not just Irish music, as used to be the case. Today the Galician fiddle is taught at three schools, and fiddle workshops for classical violinists are becoming increasingly frequent. It would not make sense to expect Galician fiddling to be limited to a repetition of songs and stories in the old style, but we should aim to play the tunes as they did, respecting the groove, tempo, and rhythm of the dances, and, in the end, getting people to dance to our instrument.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Manuel M. Murguía, *Historia de Galicia* (Lugo: Soto Freire, 1865), vol. I.

<sup>2</sup> Pablo Arribas Briones, 'Ciegos, juglares y animadores del camino', trans. by Francisco Taboas [www.ibermutuamur.es/camino\\_santiago/camino/juglares.htm](http://www.ibermutuamur.es/camino_santiago/camino/juglares.htm) [accessed 20 February 2009].

<sup>3</sup> See Daniel González Rodríguez, *Así canta Galicia: Cancionero popular gallego* (Ourense: La Región, 1963).

<sup>4</sup> Antonio López Ferreiro, *Historia de la Santa A. M. Iglesia de Santiago* (Santiago de Compostela: Imp. del Seminario conciliar central, 1902), vol. V.

<sup>5</sup> Ferreiro, V, pp. 95–96.

<sup>6</sup> Ferreiro, V, pp. 368–69.

<sup>7</sup> Ferreiro, V, pp. 369–81.

<sup>8</sup> Luís Costa, 'Las rumbas olvidadas: tr`ansculturalidad y etnicización en la música popular gallega', *Revista Transcultural de Música*, 8 (2004) [www.sibetrans.com/trans/trans8/costa.htm](http://www.sibetrans.com/trans/trans8/costa.htm) [accessed 20 February 2009].

- <sup>9</sup> See José Inzenga, *Cantos y bailes de Galicia* (Ourense: Difusora de Letras, Artes e Ideas S.L, 2005).
- <sup>10</sup> Faustino Santalices (1877–1960) is considered to be the most important researcher of the hurdy-gurdy in Spain in the first half of the twentieth century. See Antón Seoane, *Faustino Santalices* (Vigo: Ir Indo Edicións: 2000); see also [gl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faustino\\_Santalices](http://gl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faustino_Santalices) [accessed 2 June 2010].
- <sup>11</sup> See Joaquín Díaz, *Las coplas del ciego* (Valladolid: Fundación Siglo, 2002).
- <sup>12</sup> Delfín Caseiro and Castor Castro, 'O cego da Gándara', in *Lethes: Taboas Cadernos culturais da Limia* (Ourense: Centro da cultura popular da Limia, 2006), p. 15. Many other cultures also accommodated blind musicians, for example, Japan. See Ingrid Fritsch, 'Blind Female Musicians on the Road: The Social Organization of "Goze" in Japan', *Chime Journal*, 5 (Spring 1992), 58–64.
- <sup>13</sup> Caseiro and Castro, p. 16.
- <sup>14</sup> Briones, 'Ciegos...'. See also Luís Costa, *As orixes das cantigas: Contexto historiográfico* (A Coruña: Fundación Pedro Barrié de la Maza, 1998).
- <sup>15</sup> Compare the broadside ballad trade in the UK, see Leslie Shepard, *The Broadside Ballad: A Study in Origins and Meaning* (London: H. Jenkins, 1962).
- <sup>16</sup> A collection of printed lyrics, photographed by Alberto Bouzón, can be accessed on the website Portal do Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial de Galicia, devoted to the Galician intangible cultural heritage, see [ronsel.uvigo.es/index.php?option=com\\_rsgallery2&Itemid=30&gid=8](http://ronsel.uvigo.es/index.php?option=com_rsgallery2&Itemid=30&gid=8) [accessed 2 June 2010].
- <sup>17</sup> Dorothe Schubarth and Antón Santamarina, *Cancioneiro Popular Galego*, 7 vols (La Coruña: Fundación Pedro Barrié de la Maza, 1984–1995), VI, 265.
- <sup>18</sup> Schubarth and Santamarina, VI, 'Melodies'.
- <sup>19</sup> Xosé Luís Rivas, 'Florencio, O Cego dos Vilares', in booklet accompanying CD, *Pancho Álvarez: Florencio, O Cego dos Vilares*, Boa Music, CD A0100377916-0101, Madrid, 1998.
- <sup>20</sup> Rivas Cruz and Iglesias Dobarrio, II, 12.
- <sup>21</sup> José Filgueira Valverde, *Introducción y notas ilíográficas: Cancionero musical de Galicia de Casto Sampedro Folgar*, facsimile edn (A Coruña: Fundación Barrié de la Maza, 1982).
- <sup>22</sup> Eduardo Martínez Torner and Jesús Bal y Gay, *Cancionero Gallego*, facsimile of 1973 edn, new introduction by Carlos Villanueva (Vigo: Fundación Pedro Barrié de la Maza, 2007)
- <sup>23</sup> Schubarth and Santamarina, VI, 'Melodies'.
- <sup>24</sup> See Rivas, Florencio, *O Cego dos Vilares*, accompanying booklet.
- <sup>25</sup> See Rivas Cruz and Iglesias Dobarrio.
- <sup>26</sup> Schubarth spent five years researching the traditional music of Galicia leading to the seminal volume, *Cancionero Galego*, in which she includes and discusses many of Florencio's songs and tunes.
- <sup>27</sup> Christian Moll, 'Blind Fiddlers on the Fairs: Pancho Álvarez revives this Galician Tradition', review of CD, *Pancho Álvarez: Florencio, O Cego dos Vilares*, in *FolkWorld*, [folkworld.de/12/e/pancho.html](http://folkworld.de/12/e/pancho.html) [accessed 5 February 2009].
- <sup>28</sup> Schubarth and Santamarina, accompanying CD. See also Rivas Cruz and Iglesias Dobarrio, *Cantos, Coplas e Romances de Cego* (Lugo: Ophiusa, 1998; 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 2000), 2 accompanying CDs.
- <sup>29</sup> See Xoán Manuel Estévez, *Un novo estilo para a música galega: O nacemento da música folk* (Santiago de Compostela: Museo do Pobo Galego, 1998).
- <sup>30</sup> Anton Seoane and Rodrigo Romani, *Milladoiro*, Ed. Ruada LP, 1978, from website of Milladoiro: [www.milladoiro.com/WebEng/bio/bio.html](http://www.milladoiro.com/WebEng/bio/bio.html) [accessed 2 June 2010].

*Crossing Over: Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic 3*

<sup>31</sup> This group were the first to record a blind song in 1976. The leaders were Xosé Luís Rivas and Baldomero Iglesias, who twenty years later published the most important Galician book about blind fiddlers, see Rivas and Iglesias Dobarrio, *Cantos, Coplas e Romances de Cego* (Lugo: Ophiusa, 1998; 2nd edn, 2000), 2 accompanying CDs.

<sup>32</sup> Alfonso Franco, *O Violín na música Folk: Galicia 1975–2004* (Santiago: the author, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> See [www.milladoiro.com/WebEng/bio/bio.html](http://www.milladoiro.com/WebEng/bio/bio.html) [accessed 2 June 2010].

<sup>34</sup> See [www.myspace.com/naluafolk#ixzz0rA4pLsLg](http://www.myspace.com/naluafolk#ixzz0rA4pLsLg) [accessed 2 June 2010].

<sup>35</sup> See [www.fianaroca.com/en/web/historia.php](http://www.fianaroca.com/en/web/historia.php) [accessed 2 June 2010].

<sup>36</sup> See [www.berroguetto.com/en\\_US/home/](http://www.berroguetto.com/en_US/home/) [accessed 2 June 2010].

<sup>37</sup> See [www.luarnalubre.com/](http://www.luarnalubre.com/) [accessed 2 June 2010].

<sup>38</sup> See [www.novagalededanza.com/](http://www.novagalededanza.com/) [accessed 2 June 2010].

<sup>39</sup> See [e-tradvigo.blogspot.com/](http://e-tradvigo.blogspot.com/) [accessed 2 June 2010].

<sup>40</sup> See [www.sondeseu.org/](http://www.sondeseu.org/) [accessed 2 June 2010].

<sup>41</sup> See [www.myspace.com/riobogz](http://www.myspace.com/riobogz) [accessed 2 June 2010].

<sup>42</sup> See [www.myspace.com/fonsomerino](http://www.myspace.com/fonsomerino) [accessed 2 June 2010].

<sup>43</sup> See [www.roicasal.com/eng/index.php](http://www.roicasal.com/eng/index.php) [accessed 2 June 2010].