

**BASIC GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING THE MUSIC OF THE MOORS AND  
CHRISTIANS FESTIVAL  
TALK-CONCERT**

**SOCIETAT MUSICAL L'ILLA DE BENIDORM**

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**Speakers:**

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(Duration: approximately 120 minutes with an intermission for the audience)

**Introduction**

This talk does not aim to provide a historical overview or an exhaustive study of all styles of festive music. Instead, our goal is to offer insights to those unfamiliar with the musical world, helping them understand how a piece of festive music is constructed and why it has its distinctive characteristics and singularities.

**Socio-Cultural Context: The Military March and the Pasacalle as the  
Musical Origin of the Moors and Christians Parades**

**The Origins of Valencian Bands in the Early 19th Century:**

- **The National Guard Band of Paris:** During the French Revolution, a large percentage of the population was illiterate, so revolutionary ideas were best transmitted through songs. Between 1789 and 1800, over 200 hymns and 2,000 politically charged songs were composed and performed by the people in public spaces, accompanied by large wind instrument ensembles of up to 1,200 musicians. In 1789, the Paris City Council created the National Guard to maintain order, establishing a 45-member band to inspire soldiers. By 1792, this band had its own free music school for children aged 10 to 20, serving as a model for European bands.
- **Napoleonic Invasion of 1808:** French military bands were introduced to Spain, influencing local traditions. As a remnant of this era, many Valencian bands still wear military-style uniforms today.
- **Valencian Traditions:** Since the time of the Reconquista, municipal corporations hired groups of musicians to perform at grand ceremonies. By 1328, for the coronation of Alfonso VI in Zaragoza, Valencia sent a group of uniformed instrumentalists who made a great impression. Throughout the 16th-18th centuries, processions for craft guilds were always accompanied by wind musicians, and the "soldadescas" (mock battles between militia groups) featured citizens dressed as soldiers engaging in simulated combat, always accompanied by music.
- **Factors Contributing to the Development of Bands:** Economic improvements, reduced working hours, the rise of associations during the Industrial Revolution, the liberal policies of Queen Isabel II, and the Mendizábal confiscation (which led to former chapel masters directing bands) all played a role. Additionally, educational institutions for musicians emerged, and band music flourished both in rural agricultural areas and in Valencia's capital, particularly for Fallas and the Moors and Christians festivities in the Alcoi region.

- **Instrumental Innovations in the Mid-19th Century:** Developments such as Blühmel's valve system, Boehm's chromatic woodwind scale, Sax's invention of the saxophone, and Wieprecht's tuba significantly improved wind instrument capabilities.
- **The Valencia International Band Contest:** Established in 1886, this contest has become the world's most prestigious competition for wind bands, fostering intense rivalry between towns and communities, and elevating the musical level of Valencian bands to global excellence.
- **First Moorish Parade with a Music Band:** In 1817, the "La Llana" filà (group) from Alcoi was the first to be accompanied by a military band.
- **Early 19th-Century Band Repertoire:** Marches, polkas, mazurkas, waltzes, and even habaneras were popular, along with transcriptions of classical works (overtures, operas) and zarzuela, which included military-style pasacalles.

## Musical Structure in Festive Music

Music unfolds over time, creating a sound-based discourse. According to the musicologist Meyer, musical discourse is based on two fundamental concepts: Gestalt theory, which helps us perceive complete musical fragments with a beginning and an end, and Information Theory, which assigns meaning and function to these fragments within the overall structure.

**Typical Structure of a Festive Piece:** Festive compositions usually follow a symmetrical binary form (I+A-B), meaning they consist of two contrasting and independent themes, similar to Renaissance motets.

### Examples from "Festa en Benidorm":

- **First Expository Function:** Bars 2-3 (introduces a decorative element upon repetition)
- **Second Expository Function (Trio) and Climax:** Bars 4-5 (culminating point occurs after bar 5)
- **Transitional Functions:** Secondary themes serve as links and transitions (e.g., bars 1-2 and 3-4 with different endings)
- **Introductory Function:** Bar 1 (acts as an identity-defining opening, sometimes used as a bridge)
- **Concluding Function:** Bars 5 to the end (closure elements)

### Musical Examples During the Concert:

- **Christian March:** "Zoraidamir" – The origin of the march.
- **Moorish March:** "Suana" – Composer explains the creative process.

## Festive Pasodobles: Types and Characteristics

- **First pasodoble composed specifically for the Moors and Christians Festival:** "Mahomet" (1882) by Cantó, a solemn and elegant moderate-tempo piece.
- **Alcoi's "Dianer" Pasodoble:** "Anselmo Aracil" (1891) by José Espí, featuring a lively, cheerful character with bright and colorful melodies.

- **"Mi Barcelona"** – Demonstrating the parade formation and symbolic elements in melodies.
- **Arab-Influenced Pasodobles:** "K'sar el Yedid" blends Arabic scales with Spanish harmonies, incorporating the Andalusian cadence.
- **Contrasting Style:** "Orgullo Santiaguista" – A simple, energetic piece with Andalusian folk motifs.

## Christian Marches: Types and Characteristics

- **Early Christian Parade Music:** Initially, seated pasodobles were used.
- **First Christian March (1958):** "Aleluia" – Resembling a religious psalm.
- **Warrior-Style March:** "Apóstol Poeta" – Featuring battle trumpet motifs and complex composition techniques.
- **Marches Based on Valencian Folk Music:** "Pas als Maseros," incorporating regional musical themes.
- **Medieval-Inspired Christian Marches:** "Cid" – Prize-winning piece in the 1995 "Villa de Benidorm" contest, using modal vocabulary to evoke medieval music and bold brass motifs for a battle-like effect.

## Moorish Marches: Types and Characteristics

- **Early Arabic-Influenced Marches:** "Benixerrajs" (1904) by Camilo Pérez Laporta and "A Ben Amet" (1907) by Pérez Verdú introduced the slow 65 bpm rhythmic structure and exotic percussion effects.
- **Blanquer's Avant-Garde Style:** "Any d'Alferes" features melodic ostinatos, rhythmic persistence, and horizontal polyphony.
- **Modern Moorish Marches:** "Alfalig" (2024 winner of the "Villa de Benidorm" contest) incorporates Blanquer's elements while exploring distorted sounds and extreme dynamics for an expressive and intense effect.

This guide aims to provide a deeper appreciation of the rich and intricate music that accompanies the Moors and Christians Festival, enhancing the experience for both participants and spectators.