

Exhibition

FORBIDDEN VIBRATIONS

24 May 2016 to 28 August 2016

Pop music, social change
and music censorship

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EL BORN
CCM

Much like the cinema and the press, rock and pop music were unable to escape the censor's knife. In contrast to the former two, however, the repression of music intensified just as the dictatorship's grip on the country was beginning to slacken.

The Franco regime was aware of the role that music had played in the global uprisings of the 1960s and thus tried to limit its influence in an increasingly developed and cosmopolitan Spain.

This censorship forced record labels to redesign album sleeves – which today have become prized collectibles – that were deemed scandalous by the censors and to eliminate disagreeable references in song lyrics. *Forbidden Vibrations* explores the control mechanisms employed during the dictatorship – and their influence on the world of pop and rock music in Spain – by means of the album covers of the period and reports written by the censors themselves.



The Rolling Stones
Sticky Fingers (1971)

Left: original album cover
Right: spanish version



VIBRACIONES

PROHIBIDES

del 24 de maig al 28 d'agost del 2016

**MÚSICA POP
CANVI SOCIAL
I CENSURA
DISCOGRÀFICA**

Music censorship under Francoism was introduced at the very beginning of the regime in 1939. Right from the outset close attention was paid to the radio, more or less the only means through which Spanish citizens could listen to songs. Up until 1960, a single censor at the General Directorate of Radio and Television Broadcasting decided upon which songs could and could not be aired, although reasons were never given to explain these decisions. From that date until the end of 1977, various lists were produced (98 to be precise)

documenting 4,343 songs that could not be broadcast in Spain, all of which were sent to each and every national radio station. Moreover, as of 1966, 42 lists featuring 564 songs were cleared after careful reconsideration, and could be aired from then onwards.

It is generally accepted that censorship was applied with the utmost rigour during the immediate aftermath of the Spanish Civil War, to then gradually subside until 1966 when Manuel Fraga, the Minister of Information and Tourism, initiated a

policy of 'openness', enacting a new Law of Press and Print that left the gates open to irrepressible liberalisation. Although this was indeed the case to a large extent, the fact remains that the evolution of censorship was characterised more by disparities and contradictions than by consistency.

Nevertheless, it was from precisely 1966 onwards following the enactment of the above-mentioned Law of Press that Spanish censorship really started a full-scale operation on the recording industry. It

constituted a major bureaucratic system, composed of four censors of books who, for extra pay, applied the same logic to records, censoring both lyrics and sleeves. Accordingly these 'readers' would set about their work during the afternoon shifts at the General Directorate of Popular Culture, almost always noting the reasons for their prohibitions in detailed hand-written or typed reports.

This intensification of censorship within the music industry was not only a result of the new law, but also the increasing importance that pop and rock music was starting to have in Spain, to a large extent owing to the liberalisation of the regime and the end of international isolation. The potential dissemination of a piece of work and the reach of the medium through which it was broadcast were criteria taken into account by the censors in their work. As such, more efforts were made to censor films in comparison to theatrical productions, and cheap books in wide distribution were more tightly controlled than less accessible publications. Likewise, pop music, which was becoming more widely distributed and accessible to almost the entire Spanish population, was subject to particularly strict censorship.

The distribution of pop and rock music within Spain at the time was primarily due to the growth of the record industry. Virtually nonexistent until the 1960s, it began to expand at the end of that decade in line with Spain's economic recovery, which prompted greater consumption of newly affordable cultural products. The purchase of music players (record players, radios, television sets) increased exponentially, as did the supply and demand of records.

Pop music also gained importance due to a surge in messages that were critical of the regime in song lyrics. Lastly, pop music achieved a rate of distribution in Spain that was previously unimaginable, driven by the development of the mass media – especially television and radio – and the emergence of FM broadcasting stations.

Xavier Valiño
Curator

MORAL CENSORSHIP

"Immoral, obscene, tasteless, erotic, pornographic..." The moral censorship of record lyrics and sleeves during Francoism focused almost exclusively on sex and anything to do with relationships between couples.

Unlike film and literature – two areas at the forefront of studies on Francoist censorship – pop music does not contain too many references to extramarital relationships (all relationships outside of marriage), rape, abortion, adultery and divorce. However, sexuality undoubtedly plays a prominent role in rock and pop songs, and allusions to intimate relationships, masturbation, homosexuality, masochism, prostitution, as well as the mere presence of 'inappropriate' words or expressions relating to these subjects, were extensively censored.

POLITICAL CENSORSHIP

The 1960s and 1970s, when music censorship constituted piecemeal work, marked an era of profound social changes and political upheaval worldwide. It is not surprising then that these critical messages on civil rights and pacifism were echoed by pop and rock artists, who identified with their generation and, on occasions, became their spokespersons.

Anti-military songs criticising war are the most numerous in this field. At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s the USA was immersed in the Vietnam War and the younger generation constantly mobilised protests against the conflict. In addition to prohibiting any references in opposition to armed conflicts, Spanish censorship also banned criticism of State Security Forces, public authorities, and Spanish or American politics, given that the regime sought to maintain relations with the USA. Allusions to communism or anarchism, no matter how small, were also forbidden.

SOCIAL CENSORSHIP

Manifested in different forms, such as protest songs about conflicts or tirades against the society of the time, criticisms of the established norms were suppressed time and time again by Francoist censorship. All references to demonstrations, disturbance and any traces of violence were eliminated from the songs, with a view to preserving moral practices and social order.

Similarly, censors also limited the use of any 'unusual' or 'tasteless' images, particularly on record sleeves. Meanwhile, as regards song lyrics, censors were especially ruthless when it came to references regarding the hippy movement, marginalised groups, delinquents, racism and, of course, any kind of drugs. In other words, all groups that the regime banded together under the label 'layabouts and crooks' were repressed in the same way as those who opposed the dictatorship.

RELIGIOUS CENSORSHIP

Following the Catholic Church's unwavering support of the military uprising and Nationalist faction during the early years of Francoism, the regime's relations with the Church were cemented in the convention signed with the Vatican in 1941, whereby the Spanish State agreed to respect the first four articles of the Concordat of 1851, which established the confessional nature of the State and granted the Catholic Church with economic privileges, as well as leaving all matters related to education within its power.

Furthermore, the State undertook to defend the Catholic dogma in public affairs, including Church representatives in organisations related to public morality, especially those in charge of censorship. In this context, it is not surprising that censorship particularly affected matters to do with religion and Catholic morality, with even the slightest criticism or doubt being outlawed.



Roxy Music
Country life, 1975

Original album cover,
censured in Spain



John Lennon
Plastic Ono Band
Power to the people, 1971

Original album cover,
censured in Spain



The Who
Who's next, 1971

Original album cover,
censured in Spain



Elephant's Memory
Angels forever, 1974

Original album cover,
censured in Spain