

# In Memory of the Ancient Mahonese Musicians Enlisted in the U.S. Navy

The years during which the North American squadron were permitted to dock in the port of Mahón during the first half of the nineteenth century, a wide variety of relationships blossomed. The crew and mariners maintained a certain coexistence with the local population, particularly with those that acted as providers: bakers, tailors, hatters, farmers, blacksmiths, master builders, businessmen, etc., to the point of leaving a considerable trail of value and profit in the city. The local phenomenon even extended to sectors of the population with intellectual training. This was the case for a number of men that were hired as onboard teachers, from languages to arithmetic, mathematics or geometry. Additionally, there was no shortage of music teachers, many of whom found themselves promoted with contracts to join the bands that had formed in the Mediterranean fleets.

Parallel to the administrative concession of the port of Mahón as the winter base in 1825, the *Mediterranean Squadron* organized its own floating naval school. Until 1845 when North America approved the founding of the school on land and situated it in Annapolis (State of Maryland), the education of the students was carried out on the floating squadrons. The officers and professors followed their academic programs combining the theoretical classes with the practices onboard the vessels. Well, one of these naval schools operated in Port-Mahón, as it was called by the Americans, not referring to the city specifically, but rather the island of Menorca as a whole.

The presence of the musical band of 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet during this spring of 2018 , willing to offer an exceptional concert without any similar precedent except that which was recorded in Ciutadella in June of the distant year of 1953, invites one to remember that remote history. Here are some random examples.

The violin and saxophone teacher Bartolomé Mir Corantí (1851-1923), native of Mahón, traveled half the world as a musician on the frigate *Lancaster*. This musician was one of the last Menorcans to serve in the US Navy. He had enlisted in 1878. In the naval band he played the bass, and in the orchestra of the same crew, the violin.

The degree of profound relationships between the North Americans and the island of Menorca is very telling in the oral testimony that, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, referred to the Menorcan sailor Josep Riera Alemany. He said that his good friend Teodoro Ládico Font, the US consul at the time, had revealed that the offices of the English consulate in Mahón, by order of the United States government, paid more than twenty retirement pensions to other Mahonese that had served on warships.

As proof that the Americans maintained their determination to enter into labor contracts with Menorcans, beyond what was provided for in the administrative assignments regarding the use of the port, we can argue another case relating to the music teachers. It was recorded in the year 1874. An informative newsletter from the

press in those years reports in the following terms:

“Our friend and countryman D. Esteban Bagur, who with his zeal and eagerness had managed to organize a musical band in this city [of Mahón], [...], yesterday evening [September 21<sup>st</sup>] left embarked aboard the frigate *Franklin* having been contracted into the band that said vessel carries. Although we will feel his absence, we wish him every luck and happiness”.<sup>1</sup>

Esteban Bagur Sintés (1850-1897), before returning to his native city, also remained affiliated for some time with the musical band of the Spanish squadron. In sum, it is a case similar to that of Francisco Seguí Corantí. Although born in Gibraltar in 1834, he was the son of Menorcan parents who found himself enrolled in the musical band of a North American naval unit around 1853, for a period of four years, during which he became a director of music.

Ultimately, the primary role that music played in the life of the squadron during its periods of residence in the port of the Menorcan city is proven. Given that Mahón was a profoundly music-loving place, with numerous students, a municipal band, a stable orchestra for opera sessions, etc., the points of connection with the population were always constant.

“At four in the afternoon on Saturday [...] a squadron from the United States docked that, according to our reports, will remain in these waters for eight to ten days. For this reason a numerous gathering traveled along the piers of the port yesterday evening, attracted by the desire to behold the beautiful foreign vessels and listen to the brilliant strains of music that could be heard from time to time. The vessels that make up the announced squadron are: frigate *Lancaster* [incidentally, the same in which Mir Corantí served, who we have named above], hosting the admiral insignia, and the corvettes *Galena*, *Nipsic* and *Quinnebaung*.<sup>2</sup>

The same chronicler, on the day following his journalistic note, insisted in these terms:

“Intelligent people have given us the greatest praise regarding the ease and precision with which the forces of the North American Squadron have carried out their advances which, for that purpose, relocated yesterday evening to Cos Nou, particularly attracting the attention of the Marine infantry division. The band, directed by Mr. Satta, who our readers had the chance to applaud not long ago in our Theater, played with its unique mastery several pieces of its selected repertoire.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *El Bien Público*, of Mahón, 9-22-1874, n° 468, pg. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *El Liberal*, of Mahón, 5-8-1882, n° 258, pg. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *El Liberal*, of Mahón, 5-9-1882, n° 259, pg. 2.

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