



Alternative Journalism in Madrid's Blues Scene

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Abstract

This article discusses how the blues music scene in Madrid (Spain) produces its own media and communication networks, based on the genre's traditional and current development, in contrast to the lack of attention from mainstream media. Focusing on three key alternative blues-journalists whose activities relate to different periods, I trace the evolution of their practices in relationship to the scene. Overall, they have shifted from a more individual, discursive construction of the genre and the scene to the collective development of associative endeavours like the "Madrid Blues Society". I argue that in the contemporary context, where conventional media fail to provide a music press apparatus to the scene, the contributions of alternative blues-journalists, who vocationally commit to blues dissemination for long periods, provide a community sharing practice for scene participants, contributing to the scene's reproduction and gradually developing a higher self-consciousness that adapts to its dynamics.

Keywords: blues, music scene, music journalism, alternative blues-journalism, Madrid.

Introduction

The blues scene in Madrid emerged in the mid-1980s and, in almost three decades since, has received very little attention from both mainstream media and general pop-rock music press. On the back cover of his collaborative recording *Blues con los Colegas Vol. II* (Armonet 2012) Ñaco Goñi (arguably the best-known blues harmonica player in Madrid) made a significant statement that serves as a powerful indication of the relationship between the scene's musicians and different types of music journalism:

Tras la grabación de mi Blues con los colegas en 2006 recibí toda clase de felicitaciones y elogios por parte de compañeros, amigos y aficionados al género, además de muy buenas críticas por parte de los medios 'libres' donde la opinión y oferta no está supeditada a criterios y exigencias de mercado. En los mayoritarios o convencionales sigo/seguimos sin existir. No me quejo, solo lo comento.

[Translation: After recording *Blues con los Colegas* in 2006, I received all kinds of compliments and praise from colleagues, friends and fans of the genre, as well as rave reviews from "free" media where opinions and contents are not subject to market criteria and requirements. In the majority or conventional [media] I / we still don't exist. I'm not complaining, I'm just saying.]

Based on his lifetime experience and the limited media response to the previous edition of the *Blues con los colegas* volume, Ñaco Goñi expresses his feeling towards media attention in terms of both personal and collective absence in mainstream media. At the same time, he emphasizes the close attention and support offered by other forms

of media that are not driven by profit. Finally, he shows an accepting and non-demanding attitude, a relaxed pride that also expresses that it is not his intention to please conventional media. Goñi's recording project significantly included a comprehensive *blueslink*: a booklet listing, released with CD editions *Blues con los Colegas*, Vol. I (2006) and Vol. II (2012), of blues-related venues, websites, associations, photographers, and radio programmes throughout Spain. This article focuses on these alternative journalistic practices which, produced by ordinary people in their everyday lives, provide shared communicative sites for scene participants, contributing to the development of their individual and collective musical identities, and ultimately acting as a tool for self-education and self-consciousness.

Before examining alternative journalism within the Madrid blues scene, it is worth noting that, on a few occasions, Madrid's blues scene gained some limited coverage in mainstream and specialised media. "Madrid 'blues'" (Marcos 2011), an article that claimed to be an overview of the "performers that fill in the black music clubs", remains the main representation of the blues scene by mainstream media. Published in Madrid's local edition of *El País*, the article focuses on three musicians (Tonky de la Peña; Yolanda Jiménez; Francisco Simón) and several additional bands that are categorized as "the new generation" (Edu Manazas & Whiskey Train; Los Reyes del K.O.; The 44 Dealers; The Forty Nighters), as well as on the longest-standing blues bar in Madrid, *La Coquette*, (established in 1984). Although the wider attention is appreciated, regular scene participants have criticized the way in which the scene is portrayed in conventional media. In an online conversation on the 20th of February 2013,¹ Rafaela Velasco, founding member and secretary of the *Sociedad de Blues de Madrid* ("Madrid Blues Society", hereafter SBM), stated she welcomed the article, given the limited media attention to blues, but described the piece as "deliriously poor", arguing that many significant musicians were left out. Singer-guitarist Juanma Montero (member of one of the bands cited in the article) agreed, while Manuel López Poy, a music journalist and writer based in Barcelona, stated that the article was poorly documented and full of platitudes. Apart from being criticized, exceptional articles like "Madrid 'blues'" are not regarded as representative of the scene's collective appreciation and dynamics. The generally schematic portrait or individual focus of these articles does not effectively connect with committed scene participants, who collectively share discursive interpretations of the scene and its history. Ultimately, the emerging practices illustrate that the conventional music press fails to give coverage to local musicians who are engaged in underground genre-scenes, evidencing a growing gap between the everyday production and experience of music in cityscapes and its conventional media exposure.

As for a portrayal of blues by corporate media journalists, *Tren 3* ("Train 3"), a radio programme led by Jorge Muñoz from 1979 to 2007 on the specialised, public station *Radio 3*, stands out as being one of the most positively received by the scene's participants. Among the few professional music journalists that have paid attention to blues music (such as Diego Manrique, Julio Palacios, Jaime Gonzalo, Fernando Navarro, or Manuel Recio), Muñoz is considered an important influence by many experienced scene participants, particularly for his role as both gatekeeper and tastemaker, introducing blues music to upcoming musicians and general audiences. Ironically, Muñoz (2013) has never considered himself a music journalist, preferring to be identified as a disc jockey or a musical commentator.

Upon his retirement in 2008, Muñoz was honoured by scene musicians and committed participants with a celebratory performance event. Since then he has explored alternative journalistic practices such as live music video production and has occasionally participated in SBM activities like the new bands contest. In this regard, he is an example of the "significant similarity between the fan amateur writer and the professional writer as fan" (Atton and Hamilton 2008: 82). However, his professional status and, more importantly, his involvement in, and relationship and commitment to, the local scene — which has been more detached and less intense than those non-

professional, blues enthusiasts whose contributions will be discussed in this article — demands an analytic distinction of both figures.²

Studying alternative journalism in Madrid's blues scene

To discuss the alternative music-journalism practices undertaken by what Goñi refers to as “free media”, I engage with previous literature about journalism and music writing, music scenes and blues studies. First, I rely on the concept of “alternative journalism” (Atton 2002, 2003; Atton and Hamilton 2008). Drawing on a wide range of studies including radical and social movement media (Downing 1984), ‘citizens’ media (Rodríguez 2001) and democratic media activism (Hackett and Carroll 2006), alternative journalism provides a flexible, wide-ranging framework and theoretical ground to explore the complexities and varieties of non-mainstream media production. Within the potential approaches, I relate alternative journalism to music journalism hoping to bring further examples of the “multiplicity of hybridized, context-specific and contingent ways” (Atton 2003: 269) in which alternative journalism is practised. In connecting alternative journalism with music writing, I am moving from a general, broadening orientation to a more focused approach that discusses contemporary forms of alternative music-journalism, specifically through the example of alternative blues-journalism.

From a music scene perspective (Bennett 2004; Bennett and Peterson 2004; Shank 1994), this article examines the alternative journalism practices that blues enthusiasts initiate vocationally in order to spread the blues tradition and its current development. I understand Madrid's blues scene as an everyday, collective construction undertaken by different participants (musicians, audiences, producers, venues, alternative journalists, photographers, scholars...) with varying roles and implications. In this regard, the notions of alternative music-journalism and music scenes are intimately connected by their quotidian qualities. They both rely on significant, everyday practices of ordinary people in order to reproduce dynamically, and display expressive dialogues between the (past) genre traditions, which act as a common reference for participants, and emerging local scenes as negotiated, on-going trajectories.

Alternative music-journalism, which can be understood as amateur music dissemination that often involves “expert aficionados”, has become fundamental in the contemporary context, where musical production and experiences widely exceed those that take place within the conventional music industry. As it occurs within Madrid's blues scene, there are two main areas that serve as an inspiration: blues dissemination and fanzine production. The former can include publications that may look like fanzines, but are more professional, specialised magazines and scholarly work. Historically, blues writing has stood out for its detailed accuracy, collective and exhaustive genre appreciation and a combination of musical commentary with interest in the life stories of blues people. These three points describe a general, widespread approach shared by “professional” and “amateur” blues enthusiasts, which may be rooted directly or indirectly in the inspiration drawn from legendary figures like Alan Lomax (1993) and Paul Oliver (1960), influential blues magazines (such as *Blues Unlimited* and *Living Blues*) and music literature where biographies, histories and attention to certain territories prevail (Herzhaft 2003; Keil 1991; Palmer 1982).

Moreover, fanzines (Atton 2010; Duncombe 1997) are important to understand how music fans become producers and speak from their position as citizens and scene members. Furthermore, they frequently deal with particular music genres and involve do-it-yourself ethics, as well as link with the underground. In this respect, fanzine studies may be a useful starting point to approach journalistic practices within Madrid's blues scene. However, this article intends to transcend the attention to fanzines as cultural objects because, interested in a larger map regarding the blues scene perspective, their format and stylistic specificities limit the possible forms through which alternative journalism may be produced and understood.

I am proposing an updated, wide-ranging, multimedia approach that includes a variety of alternative journalism practices such as different kinds of writing (both in print and online), radio production (both in stations and online) and video recording, among other possibilities. This includes independent relationships with mainstream media, as well as appropriated uses of corporate, online platforms such as Facebook or YouTube. I consider technologies as dynamic means available for enthusiasts to develop alternative journalistic practices. Thus, rather than pointing out differences, I am interested in highlighting their common purpose, features and overall effects.

I will focus on the contributions of three alternative blues-journalists, who have been particularly important in the discursive and practical construction of the blues scene in Madrid: Javier “Jay Bee” Rodríguez, Ramón del Solo and Eugenio Moirón. All of them have been engaged in similar journalistic practices like writing articles and producing radio programmes in several formats. But at the same time they have also undertaken different, individual initiatives and have their own particular story and relationship with the scene. Emphasizing their most well-known, remarkable or influential contributions, their stories and practices strongly relate to different periods of Madrid’s blues scene, offering a panoramic view of its evolution.

This article is based on wide ethnographic field research in Madrid’s blues scene, which I conducted between October 2011 and April 2013. It included participant observation (carried out in physical and virtual places); in-depth, face-to-face interviews with key musicians; regular, informal conversations; discussions and interviews (both in person and online) with musicians, blues enthusiasts and general audience members; and live music video production. Additionally, I specifically conducted four in-depth online interviews with key local alternative blues-journalists whose discourses I draw on; three of these interviewees (Javier Rodríguez, Ramón del Solo and Eugenio Moirón) constitute the focus of this article. Based on their blues-related trajectories and activities, these interviews provide important data about their relationship to and opinion of mainstream media, and their motivations to undertake blues alternative journalism practices. Finally, I draw on my personal work experience in both national and international music press and as a developer of alternative media projects.³

I examine alternative journalistic contributions to the scene, considering their relationship with blues music and Madrid’s scene as well as the evolution of their journalistic practices. First, I introduce Javier Rodríguez’s magazine *Solo Blues* (“Only Blues”) (1985-1998), a ground-breaking initiative, which served to introduce and examine the blues tradition in Madrid. Then I discuss Ramón del Solo’s contributions as a connective, transitional figure that links the blues journalism of the 1980s, when he conducted the radio programme *El Sonido de los Pantanos* (“Swamp Sounds”), with the current importance of online communication through social networks like Facebook, which he uses as a shared site to inform about blues. Finally, I introduce Eugenio Moirón as an example of how alternative blues-journalism can meet cultural activism. Rooted in his radio programme *Blanco y Negro*⁴ (“Black and White”), Moirón’s documenting and presenting endeavours have led him to producing live music series, as well as to instigating the SBM, officially launched on 29 February 2012, of which del Solo was a founding member.

A discussion of their individual and collective contributions to the scene follows. In general, their different journalistic practices within Madrid’s blues scene show a gradual shift from a more discursive, historical approach to blues to a fully committed intervention in the local scene as activist journalists, where scene members become recorders and producers of their own reality. This might be considered a form of cultural empowerment where the value of alternative blues-journalists lies not simply in their role as message-creators and music disseminators, but as important members of a scene, whose work enables participants to come together, “to ‘analyse its historical situation, which transforms consciousness, and leads to the will to change a situation’” (Traber in Atton and Hamilton: 2008: 128).

This article argues that alternative journalistic practices in Madrid's blues scene help reimagine the current role of mainstream and conventional music journalism and offer insights about the increasingly associative, self-educative and interventionist responses that take place within music scenes. Presenting, through key alternative figures, the diachronic trajectory of a scene that has been largely ignored both in conventional music press and in academic studies, a type of music journalism will be discussed that is intimately connected to, but does not fit in with, previously analysed models such as conventional music journalism narratives, rock criticism, the development of amateurs into professional journalists, fanzines, or alternative media.

From a general journalism perspective, the relevance of these alternative practices lies not so much in a formal transformation of media, but in a questioning of its ethics and coverage. From a scene's perspective, it suggests a definite blurring of some traditional dichotomies like musician-audience and producer-consumer. Additionally, seen as social constructions involving aesthetics, politics and economics, scenes and alternative journalist practices provide porous, situated, dialoguing contexts and networks where participants build and perform their identities, individually and collectively attempting to gain responsibility over their lives.

Alternative blues-journalism: fascination, self-commitment and collective organization

Before addressing particular stories and contributions by the writers under discussion, it is worth noting that, although they have all practised music journalism activities (including CD reviews, news, interviews, reports and feature articles in different publications, radio programmes and video production), none of them identify themselves as journalists. Javier Rodríguez (2013), who is closest to the music journalist or fanzine writer figure, refuses to define himself with a tag: "I prefer to give the data (and the opinions, of course), so that everyone can develop their own understanding". Ramón del Solo (2013a), the only one who actually studied journalism for a few years, defines himself as a blues aficionado and a "blues vicious". Similarly, Eugenio Moirón (2013) describes himself as a "blues diffusor, without any more pretensions". This lack of identification with journalism relates to their non-professional status, lack of formal training and different dynamics, as well to journalism's widespread discredit in Spain.⁵

Instead, they all show a profound identification and commitment to blues, which stems out of a common passion and fascination for the music and history of the genre. While music appreciation involves personal and subjective feelings and is generally difficult to express precisely, the discourses of these scene participants have a common relation with pleasure and authenticity. "I don't know how to define it", says Moirón (2013), "but when I listened to black music I felt something different than with other music. It moved me inside ... I noticed that there was something more authentic that was capable of reaching your heart". Similarly, Rodríguez (2013) states: "thirty years after watching Muddy [Waters] live and learning Lightnin' Hopkins' breaks note by note, I am still puzzled by the expressive intensity, variety and fecundity of this music". Situated in a particular cultural environment where blues music still remains largely unknown, they have developed intense musical identities, contributing to blues dissemination and knowledge simply because, as Ramón del Solo (2013a) replies, "somebody had to do it ... The number of good aficionados is reduced so I guess if we don't do [these activities] no one will do them".

Solo Blues: pioneering publication during the crystallization of the scene

Published from 1985 to 1998, *Solo Blues* ("Only Blues") remains the only printed, blues-dedicated magazine produced in Madrid. It was self-distributed in Madrid and Barcelona to a variety of record shops, kiosks, book and comic stores, and according to Javier Rodríguez (2013) its publication ranged from 2000 to 6000 copies, a substantial

percentage of them relying on subscriptions. This self-defined “Black American Culture Quarterly” featured national and international contributions by alternative journalists, photographers, professors and label owners, but “98% of the work” was done by director Javier Rodríguez and his brother Juan Antonio Rodríguez. For Javier Rodríguez, born in Madrid in 1964, the creation of *Solo Blues* represented a chance and a challenge to practise his interests and abilities in music, graphic design and writing:

Partly to output my graphic design skills and practice with printing presses and partly due to the insistence of my brother Juan Antonio (who would be responsible for most of the thankless work), we decided to leave kind of academic fanzines aside and directly put out a magazine with all its consequences. This was in late 1984 but the first number did not come out until next summer. We could say this was a slow and complicated birth, or simply that we wanted to do it right (Rodríguez 2013).

He also speaks about the magazine as being a response to the media’s lack of attention and misrepresentation of blues, a situation that, in his view, continues today:

At the time, one of the reasons to start the magazine was the scandalous cultural level in musical matters in Spain, not only among ordinary people, but especially in the media! Absolutely shameful. Unfortunately, this has not changed much (I’d say anything) in thirty years. People are still, in the best case, drooling with white imitators, utterly ignoring the original creators. (ibid.)

Explored through its first editorial, the magazine’s interpretation of blues music emphasizes the origins of the genre, highlighting blues as the expression of the “other America” (*Solo Blues*, 1985a). It refers to the lives of ‘blues people’, from the times in southern plantations to the northern, industrial cities, and stresses the intense, everyday character of blues. The text also refers to how blues has influenced the development of jazz, soul and rock music, and then asserts the genre’s current universality. Finally, it concludes: “a lot of what jazz, rock and other American music have of revolutionary [expressive forms] – in relation to European’s musical tradition, is *only blues*” (ibid.).

Developing between 1983 and 1985, *Solo Blues* contributed to what I call the crystallization stage of the scene, a consolidating development with stable networks of committed participants playing different roles and a variety of occasional participants (who may enjoy live music, music production and nightlife) generating, and crystallizing, the clusters that shape the scene. The crystallization stage also marks a starting, foundational point that stimulates collective musical experiences. In Madrid’s case, this period is characterized by a joyful musical effervescence that relates to the political aperture and sociocultural explosion that succeeded the dictatorship of Francisco Franco (1939-1975) and developed throughout the 1980s (Fouce 2006).

In this context, the magazine played a double function, which illustrates the continuous dialogic orientation of contemporary blues scenes. On the one hand, it provided a locally produced, discursively shared site where blues tradition was disseminated and examined. On the other hand, it contributed to the history and development of blues scenes in Spain. For example, the second issue (*Solo Blues*, 1985b) combines general articles on blues artists from the African American tradition (like Bessie Smith and The Legendary Blues Band), with national and local scene information, as well as historical reminiscences (such as Big Bill Broonzy’s 1953 performance in Barcelona), live reviews (Buddy Guy & Junior Wells at Madrid’s Jazz Festival) and feature articles (such as *Las bandas españolas* on Spanish blues bands). Furthermore, it includes an announcement section titled “D.J. Play My Blues”, offering a comprehensive list of blues and R&B programmes on national and local radio, including Ramón del Solo’s “Swamp sounds”.

Solo Blues was produced by, and producer of, the blues scene until 1998, when growing familiar responsibilities related to ageing processes (Bennett and Hodkinson 2012) lead to its end. “The magazine required an almost absolute dedication that we could not maintain indefinitely”, explains Javier Rodríguez (2013). Still, after *Solo Blues*, he created *Guitar Club* in 1998, a similarly formatted magazine focused on guitar, which

turned out to be “a complete financial failure” (ibid.), publishing only the first issue. Although he has considerably reduced his engagement with the live music scene (he admitted that “it had been approximately seven years since he went to a concert in Madrid” (ibid.)), Rodríguez currently continues practising alternative blues-journalism online as *Solo Blues* became a blog in 2011.⁶ As one of Ramon del Solo's recent Facebook posts suggests, the printed magazine is ritually remembered by long-term participants:

It was the first publication on the subject written in Spanish, and maintained a level comparable to that of the English and American magazines published at the time. In these times of the internet, the ephemeral and the digital, we fans are still waiting for a printed publication with the same quality, judgment and preciseness. In many ways, the blues scene in Spain has improved a lot, but there are others in which the bar was very high and is not easily to overcome. (del Solo 2013b: web source)

Finally, it is important to note that Javier Rodríguez is also a musician. In 1993, he performed with (black) blues musicians like Carey Bell and Louisiana Red; he has self-produced two albums; and he has uploaded to YouTube⁷ numerous instrumental videos dedicated to particular techniques and styles (blues, ragtime, jazz, classical).

Ramón del Solo: the long-term coherence of a blues erudite

Ramón del Solo (born in Madrid, 1956) developed his interest for the blues in the mid-1970s. Eager to give his life a change and attracted to the countercultural movement, in 1978 he left his job and his journalism studies and travelled to France, where he worked as a migrant fruit collector, travelling through different cities. Immersed in the cultural environment of a country with a long black music tradition (Raphael-Hernández 2004, Shack 2001, Wynn 2011), del Solo found himself in a new situation where he could “develop his passion, something that was impossible in Spain”:

There were virtually no editions and it was hard to find records. In Nimes I met [music] enthusiasts and, for three years I attended the jazz festival, which included a lot of blues. For the first time, I saw B.B. King and other frontline figures. (del Solo 2013a.)

Ramon del Solo's experience in France allowed him to practise his musical identity — as a mobile and evolving construction — and marked a turning point in his dedication to blues alternative journalism. According to him, around 1984-85 back in Madrid, he started the radio programme *El Sonido de los Pantanos* (“Swamp Sounds”), which spanned five years in two different local stations. The programme had changing schedules, the most noteworthy taking place at *Onda Verde*, where, together with his friend Carmen Roperó, who focused on traditional jazz, he broadcast live from 1 a.m. to 6 a.m. This edition, described by del Solo (2013a) as “fun and exhausting”, focused on playing blues and jazz recordings, and also included interviews and live music events. After three years, he moved his programme to *Radio Mercurio*, a station “with a very high cultural standard and without the content and political ties of other community radios. It was a ‘cult station’ with a very short life” (ibid.). This was listed in the *Solo Blues* announcement I mentioned earlier, and, in fact, the first magazine issues were presented on *El Sonido de los Pantanos*, encouraging collaboration between both alternative blues-journalists.

Always with an eye on its development in Spain, Ramón del Solo continued his blues research and dissemination, collaborating in different printed and online magazines in Spain and Latin America. He created *Bluespain*⁸ (2002-2012), an online website dedicated to “diffuse blues at all levels” (ibid.). Organized in many categories, ranging from news, obituaries and general blues discussions to music teaching and instrument sales, the site's forum, which shows a national-scale audience, illustrates the importance attributed to both the past blues tradition and current development of the genre. Furthermore, *Bluespain* shows a welcoming attitude that, benefiting from the web's general writer-reader interaction possibilities, explicitly incites communication and socialization around upcoming events, blues tradition and personal music-related needs.

Ramon del Solo's accumulated work and its corresponding scene positioning gained him further relationships with other alternative blues-journalists. In 2011 he was invited to join the editorial team of *La Taberna del Blues* ("The Blues Tavern"), where significantly his articles have coincided with those of Javier Rodríguez and Eugenio Moirón.⁹ⁱ In addition, del Solo has written an upcoming biography about New Orleans pianist and singer Champion Jack Dupree, whose career was intimately linked to Europe. The book, which will be published by the music bookstore Lenoir (Barcelona), is the result of more than six years of research involving "more than twenty interviews, library documentation, and research in old publications, photography and unpublished material" (ibid.).

Based on my experience as observant participant, I argue that Ramon del Solo's most effective current alternative journalistic practices take place within the social network Facebook, where he is capable of connecting with a multigenerational, interested audience in the context of everyday life — where the reproduction of the scene as well as the aesthetic and social identification fundamentally lies. His blues-related posts (like some by other prominent participants) have become shared references of music experience, learning and socializing contexts for scene participants. His expert knowledge, continuous research and varied, regular activity (alongside the lifetime accumulation of scene friends made through other journalistic practices and face-to-face interaction) have earned him a legitimate voice within the online network dimension of the scene.

Ramón del Solo's multimedia blues posts, many of which generate discussions and debates, follow the mentioned dialogic orientation: historic posts inform about blues genre tradition (musicians, songs, events, common themes...) mainly in the US and in Madrid and Spain; and other posts relate traditional meanings of blues to current situations (for instance, linking blues to the current context of crisis). In the former, the remembrance of mythic performances in Madrid provides ritual socialization mainly for "veteran" scene participants who also attended or remember the show, and simultaneously offers younger participants a sense of historic knowledge and continuity. The latter illustrates blues' stance as a living genre capable of being applied to current experiences and situations.

Since January 2013, del Solo has been a collaborator in *La Cofradía del Blues* ("The Blues Guild"), a radio programme that the Argentinian musician Claudio Gabis conducts at *Radio Círculo de Bellas Artes* ("Fine Arts Circle Radio"). While Gabis takes a more historic approach to blues, del Solo's role in the show is as an expert in Madrid's scene. As such, he has played music from local bands and invited musicians. Significantly, he has also invited his long-time friend Javier Rodríguez. Remembering how they first met twenty-eight years ago in another radio station, *Radio Mercurio*, del Solo introduced him in relation to *Solo Blues* and, together with Gabis, they discussed the orientation and role of the magazine as well as their opinions about blues, where they drew heavily on discourses about authenticity.¹⁰

Eugenio Moirón: alternative journalism meets blues activism

Eugenio Moirón (born in Madrid, 1954) has been conducting the radio programme *Blanco y Negro Blues* ("Black and White Blues") since the year 2000 when, after a coincidental encounter with a station programmer, he decided it was an interesting idea and activity to be engaged in. He records his two-hour show twice a week at the studios of two community radios (*Radio Carcoma* and *Onda Latina*), and it is his online management (podcasts, blog and Facebook distribution) that provides the most immediate, everyday vehicle to reach Madrid's blues scene participants who tend to know him through personal interaction and for collaboration within the scene.

In *Blanco y Negro*, Moirón plays an average of twenty tunes based on his personal taste and interpretation of blues music:

The editorial line I follow is very simple, I play what I like ... It is blues, as I sometimes say, with no preservatives nor colorants — very little of what has been called blues-rock or the music of people like Joe Bonamassa, Ana Popovic, Eric Clapton, etc. Generally virtuosity is at odds with what the blues has to be; that is, the feeling, direct punches to the liver ... I recognize that I may have occasionally radiated a song a bit away from my previous definition, but overall I think the playlists are pretty "purist". (Moirón 2013)

Moirón defines his liking of blues music in terms of feeling and virtuosity, as well as by providing examples of frontline artists related to blues and rock which he considers do not fit with the authentic meanings of blues. The differentiation between blues and blues-rock, common to the three main interviewees, is particularly relevant within the scene as it generally marks a sensitive, somehow controversial frontier. In short, while rock fans have tended to value blues as an originator style, blues enthusiasts have historically reclaimed an autonomous position for blues regarding both rock and jazz (Wynn 2011). Although the majority of songs come from the American blues tradition, Moirón also plays the music of local musicians, rapidly responding to their relevant activities within the scene. Before the tunes, he introduces the personnel and gives some additional information about their style, and geographical and social context. Furthermore, he occasionally invites scene participants like Héctor Martínez, a local harmonica player, who presents and discusses his historic blues articles on Moirón's programme.

In October 2007, a few months before taking early retirement after a career as an economist, Eugenio Moirón started producing acoustic blues concert series once a month, first taking place at the event hall of *Onda Latina* and then at *Taberna Alabanda* ("Alabanda Tavern"), where the current, weekly jam sessions of the SBM take place. Initially orientated to country blues, the series kept growing in style as different bands wanted to participate, and currently counts six editions. "I can proudly say that almost all [blues] musicians in Madrid, to whom I am infinitely grateful, have performed [in these concert series]", he explains (2013). At the same time, Moirón decided to buy a video camera in order to "document the performances and disseminate them" (ibid.). Consequently, he began to record musicians in different venues, producing hours of footage about Madrid's blues scene. At the time of writing he had uploaded 538 live music videos to YouTube¹¹ and his weekly recording activity continues. But what he personally values most of his blues-related endeavours is his participation in creating the SBM (2012), a collective association focused on the scene, which definitely marks a shift from alternative journalism to blues activism. Moirón (2013), SBM founding member and treasurer, explains that "its main objective, around which all the other things are going to spin, is to promote and disseminate blues knowledge and serve as a meeting point for all of those who love this music. The other initiatives fit perfectly into this philosophy". He believes that the production of weekly concert-jam sessions constitutes the most important SBM activity as they serve as a situated meeting point for blues enthusiasts and also broaden the spectrum of fans and associates.

The organization of these Sunday concert-jam sessions also involves alternative journalistic practices orientated to the consolidation of the event and, by extension, of the SBM and the scene. First, the performances, which involve a different band each week, are announced online — on both their website and Facebook page.¹² Then, as they take place, there is continuous documentation labour going on. Moirón records the performances and Rafaela Velasco (his wife) takes photographs, always including the guest musicians who join the jam. Along with them, and apart from the board musicians, Jorge Biancotti (founding member, cameraman and freelance editor) is also a regular SBM representative at the jams. Although he often takes a few photos at the jams, Biancotti has been responsible for recording "special events" like the SBM presentation and the SBM contest for new bands, as he is more professionally trained. While photography and video on its own may not be regarded as alternative journalism, considered in conjunction with the other activities they contribute to alternative blues-journalism's main purpose of disseminating blues.

Reflecting on his trajectory, which illustrates a shift from individual to collective local engagement, Moirón (2013) explains that you have to learn “to separate personal taste from collective interests, for the sake of the two ... This is a long distance race and the results will be seen in the medium term. You have to sow before you reap”. He sees his activities as a “logical result of loving the blues and be willing to spread a vital musical expression of the twentieth century culture”, and the SBM as a culmination of collectivism that brings together “blues snipers” (ibid.) like him, also giving them the opportunity to connect with other non-profit blues associations.

Eugenio Moirón’s involvement in the local scene through his activities as alternative journalist, activist and producer has earned him a very close relationship with blues musicians. At the time of writing, they were raising money to surprise him with a new camera, a gift of appreciation that they gave him at the first SBM anniversary celebration that took place on the 6th of April 2013. This confirms that, like Kruse (2010: 631) pointed out regarding the indie scene, “the construction of situated local practices as authentic practices and the physical sites of local music remain important for scene participants [especially musicians] despite the accessibility of music through the internet”.

Imagining and constructing the scene

As we have seen, while these cases represent different possible approximations to alternative blues-journalism, they all share interpretations of blues tradition, help to spread the work of local musicians providing a minority yet firm support organization, and establish communicative networks between scene participants, as well as potential associations with other regions of Spain, Europe and the United States. In this regard, they are producers of the scene, yet at the same time (like Ramon del Solo’s experience in France clearly illustrates), music scenes work as productive sites that allow participants to “collectively share their common musical tastes and collectively distinguish themselves from others” (Bennett and Peterson 2004: 1), providing a place to develop their musical identities and life narratives. In this terrain, blues music gives a sense of “home” and belonging which is intensely felt and largely shared, providing a rich, complex and rewarding universe that grows out of aesthetic and sociocultural fascination, and potentially develops into scene reproduction-oriented activities.

Applied to the music scene perspective, Appadurai’s discussion about the work of the imagination, as “part of the quotidian mental work of ordinary people” (1998: 5), allows further understanding about the process of undertaking alternative music-journalism practices. As a property of collectives that begin to imagine and feel things together, imagination today is a staging ground for action (1998: 7–8), including a variety of initiatives. Among the exposed, the creation of the SBM represents a culmination point of alternative blues-journalism that is reached through the work of imagination, “as a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices” (1998: 5), and appropriation processes linked to situated music experiences, consciousness development and self-organization.

While these alternative blues-journalists share what might be considered a “purist” approach to the blues, their evolution and relationship with the local live music circuit and musicians reveals important differences. Javier Rodríguez’s trajectory shows an evolution from written, printed alternative journalism to a more specific and educational, online approach to instrumental music. Although *Solo Blues* included coverage both of local events and musicians, Rodríguez’s pronounced detachment from the local live circuit suggests he is least concerned with Madrid’s present story. Instead he focuses on “giving justice” to the origins of the genre and the remaining “authentic” blues musicians. In this regard, he has recently started recording an online radio programme called *Blues de verdad* (“Real Blues”)¹³ where he displays his understanding of blues as an African American musical form, and remembers historic performances in Madrid, such as Memphis Slim in 1986 or Johnny Copeland in 1987.

Eugenio Moirón's trajectory and implication represents the opposite pole. While he remains deeply in touch with blues tradition through his radio programme, the evolving diversification of his practices is orientated towards the everyday reproduction of the live music scene in urban "blues places" (Becker 2004). Developing an appreciation for local scene musicians, Moirón has moved from an individual radio practice towards collective organization, first through concert series productions and then as one of the main instigators of the blues society, an endeavour that was rooted in the existence of other similar associations like *Sociedad de Blues de Barcelona* ("Barcelona Blues Society", SBB). Ramón del Solo is somewhere in between his counterparts, and has collaborated with both of them. He is more concerned with local musicians than Javier Rodríguez and was a founding member of the SBM like Eugenio Moirón, but his face-to-face participation is much less frequent. Generally linked to alternative print and radio journalism, his long-term dedication, attention to changing dynamics and regular (online) contact with other scene participants has consolidated him as a transitional and connective figure in the scene and its general development.

Overall, the self-conscious alternative journalism practices that committed participants undertake reflect the scene's changing dynamics across time, providing evidence of its flexibility, as alternative blues-journalists vary their everyday activities and relocate their position within the scene. While face-to-face live music interaction lies at the heart of Madrid's blues scene, the discussed cases portray the scene as a complex, multidimensional universe where scene participants positively value different offline and online participatory formats.

Conclusion

A result of dissatisfaction with the media, and of potential communicative capabilities, alternative music-journalism aims to give greater exposure to specific musical and cultural expressions, which are perceived to be both under and misrepresented in conventional, or mainstream, media. In this respect, alternative journalism works at the service of a greater goal, in this case blues dissemination and scene reproduction, a general purpose that marks "an emphasis on the act over the result, at least to the degree that success is not to be measured by quantity of responses or circulation" (Atton 2002: 67).

By presenting their genre-stories individually, this article has argued that at the heart of alternative blues-journalism is both the fascination for and study of "the other", as blues is tied to African-American culture, and the study of "self, personal expression, sociality and the building of community" (Atton 2002: 54). In this respect, blues appropriation practised through alternative journalism suggests that individual and collective music identities develop in the processes of respectfully assuming a genre originally developed by "the other" as something (partially) of their own. Therefore, the sharing of music language becomes a means of approximating and dialoguing with the other. This perspective of genre construction as a social, communicative process is enriched when combined with the understanding of blues tradition as a continuum (Jones, a.k.a. Baraka 2002) and changing same (Jones a.k.a. Baraka 2010). Gilroy (2002: 101) states that,

This involves the difficult task of striving to comprehend the reproduction of cultural traditions not in the unproblematic transmission of a fixed essence through time but in the breaks and interruptions ... the invocation of tradition may itself be a distinct, though covert, response to the destabilising flux of the post-contemporary world.

While not as explicitly oppositional or political as other forms and analysis of alternative journalism, Madrid provides an example of local, cultural empowerment that responds to mainstream misrepresentation and resists dominant, profit-driven corporate dynamics. As we have seen, it is not so much an explicit contestation but a creation of alternative practices and networks that spin around music experience and aim to spread blues exposure. While aesthetic affinity is arguably the main common bond in Madrid's blues scene, Murray's (1976) and Banfield's (2010) discussions about blues politics and

ethos may serve as starting points for further research about this type of cultural empowerment, considering Madrid blues' underground status within a context of widespread crisis:

The political implication is inherent in the attitude toward experience that generates the blues-music counterstatement in the first place. It is the disposition to persevere (based on a tragic, or, better still, an epic sense of life) that blues music at its best not only embodies but stylizes, extends, elaborates, and refines into art. (Murray 1976: 68)

The philosophy or ethos of the blues is found in its insistence and focus on the life, trials and successes of the individuals on earth; it is a manifestation of the whole concept of human life. The blues gives emotional meaning to the individual, to one's complete personal life and death. It is musical existentialism. (Banfield 2010: 105)

Overall, the case of Madrid's blues scene urges us to reimagine the current role of conventional music press and alternative journalistic practices that develop within music scenes. By presenting Madrid's blues trajectory through key alternative figures, this article has offered specific, original research that speaks about the conflicting and liberating dialogues between media, music and social life, and has also provided a model that can be comparatively applied to other contemporary case studies of music and culture scenes, particularly those based on global genres with emerging territorial trajectories.

Ultimately, approaching alternative music-journalism from a scene perspective becomes increasingly important in a context where music production and experiences significantly exceed those taking place within the conventional music industry processes. Further research could be orientated towards the relationship between changing journalism dynamics from a multimedia perspective and the collective, discursive and practical construction of music scenes, as well as to the understanding of music scenes' evolution in relationship to journalistic practices. This involves a widening revision of music journalism, as well as an integration of different dimensions and interrelationships of music scenes, in order to address its overall, contemporary complexity.

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Endnotes

1. On the 20th of February 2013 I shared the article "Madrid 'blues'" (Marcos 2011) in my Facebook site *Blues Vibe* <<https://www.facebook.com/BluesVibe>> and collected the expressed personal opinions from the debate that was generated online.
2. Visual illustrations of the examined alternative blues-journalists – Javier Rodríguez, Ramón del Solo and Eugenio Moirón – can be consulted at: <http://www.academia.edu/3827127/Alternative_Journalism_in_Madrids_Blues_Scene>
3. My music press collaborations include national and international media such as *Ruta 66*, *Mundo Sonoro* and *Efe Eme* (Spain), and *All About Jazz* and *Diverse Arts Culture Works* (United States of America). I have also created my own website *Blues Vibe* <<http://bluesvibe.com/>> to spread my work and publish the extensive interviews I have been doing in Madrid's blues scene, which did not fit in the editorial lines of specialised music magazines.

4. Eugenio Moiron's radio programme can be heard at: <<http://blancoynegro.podomatic.com>> and <<http://blancoynegroblues.blogspot.com.es>>
 5. The general image of journalism has deteriorated by the editorial lines, limited coverage of cultural production and political ties of conventional media, as well as the widespread low level of TV journalism. As for music journalism, it is not a professionalized labour in itself, as it does not provide sufficient (if any) monetary income. Furthermore, lack of professional training and content and form restrictions limit identification with journalism.
 6. *Solo Blues*' blog can be accessed at: <<http://solo-blues.blogspot.com.es/>>
 7. Javier Rodríguez's YouTube channels can be viewed at: <<http://www.youtube.com/user/OtisSpain>> <<https://www.youtube.com/user/BluesdeVerdad/videos>>, and <<https://www.youtube.com/user/mercydee2/videos>>
 8. Though the website is no longer active, *Bluespain*'s forum can still be accessed at: <<http://bluespain.creatufo.com/>>
 9. A nationally-oriented website <<http://www.tabernablues.com/>> driven by genre-enthusiasts, *La Taberna del Blues* (1999-2013) was a meeting point, a forum for discussion and a site to spread the blues and document the on-going history of the blues in Spain. Originally developed in Rota (Cádiz), the project included publications by different Spanish alternative blues-journalists, such as Javier Bee Rodríguez, Ramón del Solo and Eugenio Moirón. Although its Facebook site <<https://www.facebook.com/groups/tabernablues/>> remains active, the project was replaced by a similar connective initiative titled *Conexión Blues* ("Blues Connection", 2013), which can be accessed at: <<http://conexionblues.com/>>. A graphic designer and photographer, Mabel "Ladyblues" (born in Gijón, 1976) has been one of the main instigators of both projects.
 10. This programme was broadcast on 5 March 2013 and can be heard at: <<http://cofradiadelblues.typepad.com/blog/2013/03/programa-07-05032013.html>>
 11. Eugenio Moirón's YouTube channel can be viewed at: <<http://www.youtube.com/user/blancoynegroblues>>
 12. The SBM website and Facebook page can be visited at: <<http://www.sociedaddebluesdemadrid.com/>>, and <<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Sociedad-de-Blues-de-Madrid/185495511550652?fref=ts>>.
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