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Frederic Mompou's Guitar Version of *Cançó i Dansa X*: A Dating Hypothesis

La versión para guitarra de Cançó i Dansa X de Frederic Mompou: una hipótesis de datación

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Abstract

The present paper aims to provide a dating hypothesis for the guitar version of *Cançó i Dansa X* for guitar by Frederic Mompou. This hypothesis is based on autograph documents written by the composer and the dedicatee of the diptych, which enhanced a historical reconstruction allowed by contemporary and successive sources about Frederic Mompou, Andrés Segovia, and other people and facts named in the documents. This paper ultimately shows how *Cançó i Dansa X* for guitar might be contemporary or even earlier than the versions for piano and vocal quartet and thus Mompou's first piece for guitar, ten years before Suite Compostelana.

Keywords: Andrés Segovia, Music for Guitar, Spanish Music, Guitar Version, Music Dating.

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es formular una hipótesis de datación para *Canción y Danza X* para guitarra de Federico Mompou. Esta hipótesis se basa en documentos autógrafos del compositor y del dedicatario del díptico, que hicieron posible una reconstrucción histórica, además de fuentes contemporáneas y sucesivas sobre Federico Mompou, Andrés Segovia y otros hechos y personas nombrados en los documentos. Este artículo evidencia en última instancia que *Canción y Danza X* para guitarra podría ser contemporánea o anterior a las versiones para piano y para cuarteto vocal y, por lo tanto, la primera pieza para guitarra de Mompou, diez años antes de Suite Compostelana.

Palabras clave: Andrés Segovia, música para guitarra, música española, versión de guitarra, datación musical.

Introduction

The Barcelonan pianist and composer Frederic Mompou (1893-1987) is still acknowledged as one of the greatest Catalan musicians of the 20th century. Though he is best known for his piano works, he also wrote three compositions for guitar; after all, his guitar works clearly demonstrate that Mompou had a personal idea of the sound and possibilities of the instrument in spite of being so faithful to the piano.

Throughout his life, Mompou had continuous contact with the guitar and with the great Catalan and Spanish guitarists of his time (notably Miquel Llobet, Andrés Segovia, and Narciso Yepes). This exposure to the guitar might have been the source of a personal vision of the instrument, incredible guitar technique for a pianist, which clearly underlies Mompou's pieces.

His guitar works are perfectly consistent with the aesthetics of his pianistic compositions; however, they show a deep, instinctive understanding of the idiomatic characteristics of the instrument in matters such as resonance and polyphony and incredibly few pianistic elements.

Even before Frederic Mompou started composing for the guitar, it is quite obvious that its sonority was deeply rooted in his personal experience and, most importantly, in his auditory imagination. Indeed, the guitar is somehow evoked by two works for piano, *El carrer el guitarrista i el vell cavall* (The street, the guitarist and the old horse) and *Prélude pour la main gauche* (Prelude for the left hand). The composition of *Prélude pour la main gauche* (1930) began as Mompou's left hand started moving on the piano while he was talking with the guitarist Miquel Llobet (Herralde, 1976). On the other hand, *El carrer el guitarrista i el vell cavall* belongs to the early work *Suburbis* (1916-1917). It is a collection of small piano pieces painting the popular and urban sounds of Barcelonan suburbs, which had nourished the composer's imagination since his childhood (Bastianelli, 2021, p. 19). *El carrer el guitarrista i el vell cavall* corresponds to this evocative description of a Barcelonan suburb in Mompou's notes:

It is not really a road, but neither is it truly a street. On one side, there are modest little first-floor houses, and on the other side, there are the fields. The tobacconist is recognisable through a discoloured national flag. The rag-merchant's small shop is shady, with the little flag of rags and the bird at the door. At the grocer's house, the fruit is covered by a pink mosquito net. Tireless hammer stroke! How well you accompany with your rhythm the simple song sung by the mother over there in the little apartment while she is mending the clothes. The road is poorly maintained and the holes are deep. All the factory sirens have let hear their lonely wail in the

evening mist over the fields that are already shady of rest. Groups of workers passing by fill the road, which emanates a smell of chimney smoke. The lamplighter lights up the street lamps and in the little apartments, the candlelight fills the walls of shadows among which the desire of an adolescent sensuality arises. With the night, silence has come. The hour strikes heavily and all is left in the street is just the memory of a guitar's music. A cart full of rocks goes by, and the horse, with big and compassionate eyes, pulls with effort, slowly, dragging a sick hoof.¹ (Janés, 1987, pp. 103-104) A decade after *Suburbis*, in 1927, Mompou showed a first hint of desire to compose a piece for guitar. The proof of this first, early impulse is a sentence that the composer wrote in a letter to his friend Manuel Blancafort: "Moreover, as I am in good condition while doing a quartet movement, other motifs come to my mind and bring me new ideas; they might result in a piece for guitar or maybe in a melody" (Mompou, 1927, p. 2).²

It seems that he did not actualize this desire until the Fifties. Indeed, the first certain testimony of the existence of guitar works by Frederic Mompou is a sentence in a letter of 27th January 1953. This letter was from the guitarist Andrés Segovia (1893-1987), who wrote: "Your small works go perfectly well with the guitar and I wish that you would quickly send me the other movements that will

1 Original text: "No és purament una carretera, però tampoc és completament un carrer. D'un costat són casetes humils de primer pis, i de l'altre costat són els camps. / L'estanc s'endevina per un descoloriment de bandera nacional. / La botigueta del drapaire és ombrosa amb la bandereta de retalls i l'ocell a la porta. / A casa del droguer la fruita està coberta amb una mosquitera rosa. / Incansable cop de mall! que bé acompanyes amb el teu ritme la cançoneta senzilla que la mare canta dalt del piset tot apedassant la roba. / La carretera està mal cuidada i les roderes són profundes. / Totes les sirenes de les fàbriques hat fet sentir el seu plany sol entre la boira de la tarda per sobre els camps que ja sombregen de repòs. / Passen les colles de treballadors que omplen el carrer, que desprèn una olor de fum de llar. / El fanaler encén els fanals del carrer i en l'interior dels pisets la llum de les espelmes omple les parets d'ombre entre les quals neix el desig d'una sensualitat d'adolescent. / Amb la nit ha vingut el silenci. / Toquen pesadament les hores i en el carrer sols ha quedat el record d'una musiqueta de guitarra. / Pasa un carro ple de rocs, i el cavall d'uns ulls grossos i compassius tira amb esforç lentament, arrossegant una pota malalta" (this and all the translations are provided by the author).

2 Original text: "Además, com que estic en bon estat mestres estic fent un temps de cuarte, altres motius venen a portarme noves idees potser resultarà una pessa per a guitarra, potser una melodia."

constitute the Suite" (Segovia, 1953, p. 1).³

Although Mompou and Segovia already knew and esteemed each other (Iglesias, 1992), the summer courses of *Música en Compostela* deepened the rapport between them. Taking place since 1958, they also led to the commission of "a composition rooted in Galicia which would have the stature of a concert piece" (Iglesias, 1992, pp. 221-222). This composition would later become the most famous of the composer's guitar works, *Suite Compostelana*.

A decade later, in March 1972, Mompou added a thirteenth diptych for guitar to his cycle of *Cançons i Danses*. *Cançó i Dansa XIII*, based on the Catalan tunes *El cant dels ocells* and *El bon caçador*, was dedicated to the Spanish guitarist Narciso Yepes (1927-1997). It was the composer's last work for guitar.

During an interview, while talking about *Suite Compostelana* and *Cançó i Dansa XIII*, even the composer's wife emphasized his husband's interest in the guitar; indeed, she claimed: "Mompou knew the guitar well and he liked it" (Comellas, 1993, p. 40).⁴

Suite Compostelana, composed in 1962 and dedicated to Andrés Segovia, is the only guitar piece by Mompou whose first edition was edited and fingered by the dedicatee; the Andalusian guitarist also included its recording in a long playing alongside Alexander Tansman's *Suite in modo polonico*. As for *Cançó i Dansa XIII*, its recording was included in Yepes's long playing *Música Catalana* a few months after its composition; it was Jordi Codina, though, who edited its publication. Thus, the circumstances of the composition, the publication, and the first recording of *Suite Compostelana* and *Cançó i Dansa XIII* are known. The origins of Mompou's third piece for guitar, on the contrary, are a real mystery.

Cançó i Dansa X

Cançó i Dansa X was written by Frederic Mompou in 1953 for both piano and vocal quartet and it was published by Salabert Éditions. It is the tenth of a cycle of songs and dances composed over a large period of time, from the Twenties until the Seventies (Bastianelli, 2021).

After publishing twelve diptychs for piano, Mompou claimed: "At the moment I have twelve [*Cançons i Danses*] and I think I will finish here because, if you begin the thirteenth, then you are forced to write twenty-four!" (Trébouta & Vozlinsky, 1971, 27'20")⁵. Over the following years, however, Mompou added three new diptychs to his *Cançons i Danses*. In 1972 he composed *Cançó i Dansa XIII* for guitar, which he dedicated to Narciso Yepes. He also added

two last diptychs for keyboard instruments: the fourteenth, for piano, and the fifteenth, for organ.

The cycle of the *Cançons i Danses* is overall inspired by Catalan folklore and most of the musical material used by Mompou comes from his homeland's folksongs. There are only a few exceptions: some original compositions and *Cançó i Dansa X*, whose musical material is derived from two of the medieval *Cantigas de Santa Maria* attributed to Alfonso X, the Wise King. According to Mompou's wife, *Cançó i Dansa X* is a "very sober, very religious harmonization" of the melodies (Comellas, 1993, p. 38)⁶ of *Cantigas* number 100 (Mettmann, 1959, pp. 285-286) and 179 (Mettmann, 1961, pp. 197-198).

Nobody knew that a guitar version of *Cançó i Dansa X* existed before Angelo Gilardino found its undated autograph manuscript. It was in Andrés Segovia's archives in Linares (Gilardino, 2001), so it looks like the Andalusian guitarist was the musician for whom the composition was conceived. It seems that Segovia never played it or talked about it, and neither did Mompou. This manuscript was thus rediscovered and published posthumously and no sure evidence about its date has ever been found. The aim of this study is to present a dating hypothesis for *Cançó i Dansa X* based on the correspondence between Segovia and Mompou and on the biographical facts of their life.

An address on the last page of the autograph

The first element of this dating hypothesis is the address written on the last page of the autograph of *Cançó i Dansa X* (Attademo, 2010, p. 82), "Durán y Bas 1 Barcelona". It was the address of the apartment owned by Lluís Duran i Ventosa, the second husband of Mompou's mother, Josefina Dencausse.

According to Janés (1987), Mompou moved to his mother's house in 1941, as he returned to Barcelona from Paris. At first, Frederic, Josefina, and Lluís lived on Passeig de Gràcia because Duran i Ventosa's apartment had been damaged during the Spanish Civil War, so it was still under repairs. About one year later, after the completion of all repairs, the family moved to Carrer de Durán i Bas, 1. The composer lived there until his mother's death, which occurred in February 1953. After Josefina's death, he moved to his brother's apartment in Avinguda de la República Argentina. After Mompou's marriage to Carme Bravo in 1957, the couple moved to Carrer del Mestre Nicolau. Thus, the address written on the last page of the manuscript is that of the apartment where Frederic Mompou lived from 1942 until February 1953. As the composition date of the versions for piano and for vocal quartet is precisely 1953, *Cançó i Dansa X* for guitar might date back to the same period.

3 Original text: "Tus obriras van perfectamente a la guitarra y desearía que no tardases mucho en mandarme los otros numeros que han de componer la Suite."

4 Original text: "Mompou coneixia bé la guitarra i li agradava."

5 Original text: "Actuellement, j'en ai douze [*Chansons et danses*] et je crois que je vais finir ici, parce que, si on commence la treizième, alors on est obligé d'en faire jusqu'à vingt-quatre!"

6 Original text: "Una harmonització molt sobria, molt religiosa."

7 Information telephoned by the Fundación Andrés Segovia of Linares.

An undated letter to Segovia

The correspondence between Mompou and Segovia preserved in the *Biblioteca de Catalunya*⁸ is another element to be considered. Most of the letters in this collection, dated or undated, are referable to the years ensuing the composition of *Suite Compostelana*. Only one dated letter was certainly written before the *Suite*: Segovia's letter of 27th January 1953. Of all the correspondence preserved in the Fons Mompou, only one undated letter to Segovia mentions a *Canción y Danza* for guitar. This is surely a reference to *Cançó i Dansa X*; indeed, Mompou composed no other work of this cycle for the Andalusian guitarist (the only other diptych he wrote for guitar, the thirteenth, was dedicated to Narciso Yepes). However, there is no other explicit mention of *Cançó i Dansa* in the letters that Mompou and Segovia exchanged.

The letterhead is that of *L'Ermita*⁹: the drawing of a little hermitage with two poplars made by Frederic's brother, the painter Josep. Here is the text of Mompou's letter alongside its English translation (Tab. 1).

<p>Querido amigo Segovia: Fué una pena para mi verme privado de tu concierto y del placer de saludarte el pasado domingo. Estaba de excursion con unos amigos entre ellos el escritor suizo John Knittel y estaba prevista nuestra llegada las 6 pero falló el horario! Te telefoneé a la mañana siguiente y me contestaron que ya habías volado. Tenia mucho interes é ilusion en saber si mi "Canción y Danza" era guitarrística. Estoy estos dias intentando escribir algo mas para este dulce, pero rebelde instrumento, que tu eres el único en dominar. Con mi cordial abrazo, F. Mompou</p>	<p>Dear friend Segovia: It was a pain for me to be deprived of your concert and of the pleasure to say hello last Saturday. I was on an excursion with some friends, among whom the Swiss writer John Knittel, and our arrival was foreseen for 6 p. m., but we were late! I called you the following morning, but I was told that you had already taken a flight. I was curious and desirous to know whether my <i>Canción y Danza</i> was guitaristic. In these days, I am trying to write something more for this sweet, but rebel instrument, which only you can dominate. Hugs, F. Mompou</p>
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Figure 1

Mompou's undated letter to Segovia (Janés, 1987, p. 82).

Mompou's undated letter was clearly written prior to 1963, as it is completely different from those exchanged after the composition of *Suite Compostelana*.

8 Andrés Segovia, correspondence sent to F. Mompou and Carme Bravo (with 16 letters from Mompou to Segovia). These letters are preserved in Barcelona, Biblioteca de Catalunya, included in M 5022/4.

9 L'Ermita was a refuge that Mompou had founded with his friend Guillem Viñas. It was a sort of shelter where they could meet. They organised reunions in order to talk about art, literature and religion. L'Ermita was located in La Garriga, in the province of Barcelona (Janés, 1987).

First of all, the topics of this letter are completely unrelated to the conversations between 1963 and 1978, which can be easily reconstructed. Indeed, the main topics of the correspondence are *Suite Compostelana* (its fingering, execution, editing, publishing, recording, and rights), the French documentary *Federico Mompou* for the series *L'homme et sa musique*, the death of Segovia's daughter, *Música en Compostela* and health problems.

Moreover, in this letter, Mompou used the guitarist's surname in the salutation and his own surname in the signature. However, the composer and the guitarist used first names in both the salutation and the signature in all of the correspondence from 1963 until 1978, which implies a different degree of intimacy. Therefore, it is likely that this undated letter was written prior to the others. This implies that Mompou probably finished the guitar version of *Cançó i Dansa X* before *Suite Compostelana*.

A dating hypothesis for Mompou's letter

This dating hypothesis for Mompou's undated letter is based on elements provided by the writer. It takes into account the Sunday day trip and the presence of John Knittel as well as some details about Segovia's concert.

The excursion

Mompou's short description of the excursion hints at two elements: firstly, the presence of a Swiss writer named John Knittel and secondly, the fact that this day trip took place with a group of friends on a Sunday.

John Knittel was a Swiss writer who enjoyed a wide success in Spain in the Forties. It seems that he had no direct contact with the composer, but he knew Josep Janés (1913-1959). He was a Catalan poet and publisher and a great friend to Mompou, who composed a cycle of five songs titled *Combat del Somni* on five poems from Janés's homonymous collection.

Mengual Català (2013) affirms that Knittel met Janés in 1944 when he went to Madrid looking for a Spanish publisher after the success of the film based on his novel *Via mala*. In 1946, Janés bought a house in the neighborhood of Pedralbes and he started to receive important representatives of Barcelona's cultural life. Alongside intellectuals such as Ignacio Agustí, Eugenio d'Ors, Sagarra, François Mauriac, Mika Waltari, Roger Caillois, André Maurois, he regularly met Frederic Mompou and John Knittel.

Therefore, John Knittel was a member of the same group of friends as Mompou, who knew the poet well. There is no trace of personal contact between Mompou and Knittel; it is worth mentioning that they met their common friend Josep Janés in a group formed by about twenty people (Mengual Català 2013).

Janés (1987) explains that the undated letter's connection to Josep Janés is confirmed by a second element:

the excursion with a group of friends on a Sunday afternoon. Indeed, after the Janés family moved to Pedralbes, Frederic Mompou and Carme Bravo used to spend their Sunday afternoons with them and they often made excursions by car all over Catalonia. The habit of meeting for Sunday excursions continued until 1959, the year of Josep's fatal accident. His death caused great emotional distress to Mompou, leading to an affective substitution that brought him closer to the young composers of that time.

In conclusion, based on the details about the excursion that can be inferred from the document, Mompou's letter can be dated to around 1946-1959. Thus, Segovia's concert might have taken place on the same day as one of Mompou's usual Sunday excursions with Carme Bravo and the Janés family.

Segovia's concert

Based on the information discussed in the previous paragraph, a minimum start time, a place, a day of the week and an approximate range of years can be defined for Segovia's concert. The arrival of the group of friends was planned for 6:00 p.m. and the concert began after their scheduled return time. Moreover, both Mompou and the Janés family lived in Barcelona, which means that they very probably left there and got back there after their day trip. Therefore, the concert most likely took place in the Ciutat Comtal and started after 6:00 p.m. on a Sunday afternoon between 1946 and 1959.

Only two concerts meet all of these requirements: those of 14th and 21st December 1952, namely *Recital Andrés Segovia* and *Despedida de Andrés Segovia*. Both were held in Barcelona at the Palau de la Música Catalana; both took place on a Sunday and started at 6:30 p.m.¹⁰

These concerts were part of a charity tour in Spain after Segovia's long absence from the Spanish concert scene. Segovia's tour started with the recital on 14th December in Barcelona and continued with concerts in Madrid, Santander, Bilbao, Vitoria, and San Sebastián. On 21st December, Segovia went back to Barcelona and the following day he played in Valencia. On Christmas Eve, he went to Jaén, where he received two honors and performed twice (on 25th and 26th December). The concert tour continued in Madrid and Oviedo and ended on New Year's Eve in Gijón (López Poveda, 2009).

Two concerts in Barcelona within a week of each other might also explain why further correspondence on this piece is not available and why the composer's address is written on the last page of the manuscript. Indeed, Mompou could have handed it in person to Segovia on the occasion of his first concert, in order to get his opinion the following week. On the other hand, if he had sent the manuscript to Segovia by post, he would have put it in an

envelope bearing his address and he would have added a letter, in which he could specify it again.

A letter from Segovia

Thus, only one of Mompou's and Segovia's letters preserved in the Fons Mompou of the Biblioteca de Catalunya mentions a *Cançó i Dansa*. It is quite unrelated to the rest of the correspondence because of the topics and of the use of surnames for the salutation and the signature.

López Poveda (2009) writes that the only document preserved in the Fons Mompou showing similarities to this undated letter dates back to 1953. Segovia wrote it a few days after his arrival in the United States from Lisbon. His concert tour in North America began on 17th January 1953, which was the date of his first concert in New York, and went on until the end of March, when he arrived in Central America. Then, at the beginning of April 1953, he started touring South America.

Here is the text of Segovia's letter of 27th January 1953 alongside its English translation (Tab. 2):

27 de enero de 1953 Mi querido Mompou: me ha sido imposible escribirte antes por la acumulación de trabajo y de viajes. Sin apenas descansar, ya estoy en danza en este enorme territorio de los Estados Unidos, volando casi diariamente. Tus obritas van perfectamente a la guitarra y desearía que no tardases mucho en mandarme los otros números que han de componer la Suite. Quisiera tocarlos en el segundo recital que daré en Nueva York antes de emprender mi tournée por América del Sur, o sea, a fines de marzo. Si eres diligente, podré incluirla en mi programa. Mi dirección central es: 248 Central Park West, New York, 24, o si extravía esta carta, escíbeme al Consulado General de España, en Nueva York, así: Spanish General Consulate, New York City. Adiós. Un abrazo de tu amigo y admirador Segovia ¹¹	27 January 1953 My dear Mompou, It was impossible for me to write to you sooner due to the load of work and travel. With barely any rest, I am already busy in this enormous territory of the United States, flying almost every day. Your small works go perfectly well with the guitar and I wish that you would quickly send me the other movements that will constitute the Suite. I would like to play them in the second recital that I will give in New York before I start my tour in South America, which means at the end of March. If you are diligent, I will be able to include them in my program. My central address is: 248 Central Park West, New York, 24., or, if this letter gets lost, write to me at the Spanish General Consulate in New York, like this: Spanish General Consulate, New York City. Goodbye. A hug from your friend and admirer Segovia
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Figure 2

Mompou's letter to Segovia (27 January 1953).

There are striking similarities in both content and level of formality between this text and Mompou's undated

¹⁰ The start time is written on the concert programs preserved in the Centre de Documentació de l'Orfeó Catalá.

¹¹ The letter has been transcribed with Andrés Segovia's original spelling and punctuation.

letter. Firstly, this is the only other letter in which the writer used surnames for the salutation and the signature. Undoubtedly, the rapport between the guitarist and the composer deepened over the following years, notably thanks to the summer courses of Música en Compostela that were created in 1958, resulting in the commission of Suite (Iglesias, 1992).

A second similarity between the two letters lies in their content. The key subjects of Mompou's letter were the comment on Segovia's departure by plane immediately after his concert, the feedback request on Canción y Danza, and the news that he was trying to write something more for guitar.

Thus, Segovia's paragraph about the amount of work and travel seems connected to Mompou's remark about his rapid departure after the concert. It even includes a commentary about the necessity of traveling almost every day, by which the writer hinted that he had to fly ceaselessly and resumed the subject of his rapid departures after his concerts.

In the following paragraph, Segovia gave a positive opinion of Mompou's piece, which he found very suited to the guitar. He also encouraged the addressee to keep on composing for him and showed his interest in receiving other works, replying thus to the last sentence of the body of the undated letter. Both these elements and the date suggest that the above message might be Segovia's answer to the composer.

Segovia did not write the title of the piece, but it is likely that he referred to *Cançó i Dansa X*. Indeed, the diptych has an incredible guitar technique and the word *obritas* (small works) perfectly suits its manuscript, which is made of two short pieces of one page each. In fact, Mompou composed only one other work for the Andalusian guitarist, Suite Compostelana; the small pieces mentioned in this letter could not belong to it as the commission of Suite originated from the summer courses of Música en Compostela, which began five years later.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Segovia's letter testifies that, in January 1953, Mompou had already composed *obritas* (small works) for guitar and that he had already requested an opinion from the greatest guitarist of that time on the compositions' suitability to the instrument. Therefore, it is irrefutable that Mompou had already composed for guitar about a decade before *Suite Compostelana*.

Based on all the elements considered for this dating hypothesis – which is to say: the address written on the last page of the autograph, the elements mentioned by Mompou in his undated message, and Segovia's letter of January 1953 – the guitar version of *Cançó i Dansa X* could coincide with the *obritas* composed in 1952. Thus, the tenth diptych of *Cançons i Danses* would be Frederic Mompou's first composition for guitar.

After all, this dating hypothesis cannot come as a surprise. Indeed, Mompou's interest in composing for guitar started long before 1952, as demonstrated by this sentence: "Moreover, as I am in good condition while doing a quartet movement, other motifs come to my mind and bring me new ideas; they might result in a piece for guitar or maybe in a melody" (Mompou, 1927, p. 2).¹²

Further research is needed in this matter. In fact, according to all the elements taken into account for this dating hypothesis, *Cançó i Dansa X* could date back to 1952, while the official composition date of the versions for piano and vocal quartet is 1953. Therefore, Mompou might have written the version for guitar at the end of 1952 and those for piano and vocal quartet the following year. This means that this diptych could be Mompou's first original composition for guitar, even though it remained unpublished, unrecorded, and thus unknown for half a century.

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12 This quote comes from Mompou's letter to his friend Manuel Blancafort of 3rd May 1927. Original text: "Además, com que estic en bon estat mestres estic fent un temps de cuarte, altres motius venen a portarme noves idees potser resultarà una pessa per a guitarra, potser una melodia."

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