



Editor's Note:

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It has been translated into English and made available here for our English-speaking readers.



A Dedicated Musician

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Historian and founder of Casa Paoli



Eustaquio Pujals was born in Ponce in 1875 and passed away in his hometown on April 17, 1925. He learned to read and write under the tutelage of educator Hemeterio Colón Warrens. From a very young age, he showed an interest in learning the violin, and his mother sent him to Guayama to study with the master musician Balbino Aquino.

He eventually abandoned those studies and returned to Ponce. His mother, Eustaquia Ortiz, arranged for the young Eustaquio to learn the blacksmith's trade mentored by the foreman of the Querejeta foundry and blacksmith shop. Eustaquio devoted himself to this craft for many years, though he always maintained a strong preference for music and singing.

He eventually decided to learn the guitar and gave up his work as a blacksmith after finishing a stint laying tracks for the electric tramway in Ponce. Determined to learn music, he acquired an "Eslava" method book on his own and studied with great zeal and diligence as is typical of individuals driven by personal will and commitment.

Relying on his friendships with musicians and teachers such as Cosme Tizol, Domingo ("Cocolía") Cruz, and Juan Ríos Ovalle, Pujals sought their advice to help resolve the musical challenges he faced daily. Through this immense effort, he mastered music and joined the Ponce Firefighters' Band, volunteering his time without any remuneration when he played the French horn and later the bass drum.

Later, he learned to play the timpani and the double bass. When the brilliant Mexican artist Esperanza Iris (María Bofill) visited Ponce, he had the opportunity, facilitated by her impresario, Maestro Miguel Gutiérrez to play the double bass as part of the local orchestra accompanying her performances at the Teatro La Perla during the season running from June 12 to August 11, 1909. It was on this occasion, specifically on August 9, that Esperanza Iris premiered the operetta "The Merry Widow" in Puerto Rico.

At the conclusion of Esperanza Iris's season in Puerto Rico, while the company was in San Juan, Eustaquio was invited to join the tour as it continued to Cuba, having already been selected to play the double bass for her performances in both Ponce and San Juan.

During that trip to the beautiful Caribbean island, Pujals was able to rub shoulders with great musicians who lived in or visited Cuba. Thanks to his talents as a composer and instrumentalist he wrote songs, "guarachas", and "danzones", among other genres. Eustaquio received excellent offers from the Victor Company to record his works, performing the vocals and accompanying himself on the guitar; consequently, he was invited to Cuba to record several of his songs. For a time, his compositions benefited from the timely collaboration of friends who were also from Ponce: tenor Rafael Vázquez, falsetto singer Chito González, and tenor Manuel R. Martínez. Eustaquio himself sang and played the guitar, while Martínez and Vicente Esbrí, known as Tito, played the flute.

With these voices and instruments, Eustaquio would perform his beautiful and highly acclaimed songs and "guarachas", for which he wrote both the lyrics and music at parties and gatherings of friends. Among the earliest were "La muerta" (scored for four voices and two flutes), "La Mascarita," and "La japonesita." He also set music to works by others such as "Lobregueces" and "Casta niña," written by the journalist Alfonso Gual, with whom he maintained a close, fraternal friendship. His repertoire included "danzones" like "El sombrero de Gaspar," "El dengue," and "Si lo ves te espanta," as well as the very popular "Canción del Soldado." He composed this march for a competition held in San Juan during the Great War (1917); although the prize went to a different march, our inspired composer was unperturbed. In time, Eustaquio experienced the deep satisfaction of seeing his "Canción del Soldado" triumph not only in the hearts of the Puerto Rican people but also at the "Las Casas" military camp, where the troops warmly and enthusiastically embraced the piece.

Upon his death, Eustaquio left behind his wife, Olimpia Mayoral, and his children Amneris (a boy of thirteen with a talent for the piano) and Lucia (aged nine) bereft of his affection and left to face the future without his support.