

The arrival of the first film sound systems in Spain (1895-1929)

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ABSTRACT

During the final decade of the 19th century, inventors such as Thomas A. Edison and the Lumière brothers worked assiduously to find a way to preserve and reproduce sound and images. The numerous inventions conceived in this period such as the Kinetophone, the Vitascope and the Cinematograph are testament to this and are nowadays considered the forerunners of cinema. Most of these new technologies were presented at public screenings which generated a high level of interest. They attracted people from all social classes, who packed out the halls, theatres and hotels where they were held. This paper presents a review of the newspaper and magazine articles published in Spain at the turn of the century in order to study the social reception of the first film equipment in the country, as well as to understand the role of music in relation to the images at these events and how the first film systems dealt with sound.

Inventions and the importance of sound

The first years of the cinema are generally considered the era of silent film, although it cannot be said that cinema as a whole and with all its complexity was completely devoid of sound during its beginning. What is clear is that 1927 marked a turning point for sound within the film industry and established a before and after, as this year saw the release of the first film considered as “sound film”, *The Jazz Singer*¹. That said, there is evidence of inventions and devices that sought and achieved – albeit unreliably – synchronisation between sound and moving images going as far back as the end of the 19th century. The fashionable motion picture devices of the period were very different from each other, and although it is widely accepted that the Lumière brothers’ Cinematograph was the prevailing medium for filming and reproducing moving images, there were in fact dozens of contemporary inventions offering different ways of seeing (and hearing) the moving image. Nevertheless, it is true to say that silent film was indeed pre-eminent during these years and the fact that sound pictures did not make an impact beforehand can be attributed to “the poor synchronization, inadequate amplification, and a lack of commercial savvy (and capital) on the part of their inventors” (Altman, 2004, p. 158).

The importance the inventors of the first film equipment placed on sound was reflected in their desire to create systems that were able to synchronise the moving image with sound. Edison refers to this in an interview with the *Montreal Daily Star* in 1895²:

For myself, I have no doubt whatever of the outcome. Before many years we will have grand opera in every little village at 10 cents a head. And the very highest grand opera - you will see and hear Patti in your own parlor. She will be heard a hundred years after her death, and seen and will move and thrill her auditors in 3010. The president’s inauguration can be treated in the same way. Pope Leo and his cardinals may be seen and heard for unnumbered centuries to come.

1 This film was directed by Alan Crosland and the leading role was played by the Broadway star Al Jolson. It was the first feature-length sound picture to synchronise moving images with the human voice, also known as a “talkie”, or “talking picture”. It should be noted, however, that both a short film, *A Plantation Act* (1926) and the feature-length *Don Juan* (1926) had been released the year before. These were the first to use the Vitaphone system, which standardised sound in Hollywood films.

2 Edison and the Kinetograph (1895) *Montreal Daily Star*, 20 April 1895. In *Film History*. Malaysia, 1999, Volume 11, pp. 404-408.

International reception and initiatives in Spain

International developments in the world of film reached Spain fairly quickly considering the time it usually took to disseminate news and innovations during that period. The first references in the Spanish press to many inventions such as the Kinetoscope, the Cinematograph or the Animatograph came only a few months after they were presented for the first time in the countries where they were produced³.

The number of systems designed to establish a sound picture industry during these years is almost too many to count, but yet many were simply failed experiments, some were not well received and so were limited to one or two public screenings, and others did not even get beyond the private screening stage⁴. At the same time, a large number of both national and international patent applications were filed for devices that combined sound and moving images⁵.

A detailed study of all these devices would exceed the aims of this article, so we will focus on the three sound and moving image systems that featured most in the press between 1895 and 1929⁶: the Kinetophone, the Chronophone and the Phonofilm. It should also be noted that even though this article focuses on systems imported from abroad, there was substantial production in Spain itself which deserves to be looked at in depth in a separate study. Ramón del Río, an entrepreneur and one of the leading figures in Spain at the time, deserves a mention. In 1896 he presented the *Monvógrafo* (or *Mouvógrafo*), a device designed to work in conjunction with the Phonograph; and a few years later, in 1900, he began to “roll the first musicals – billed nationally as *Cronofotogramas* – by connecting up to six phonographs to his projections”⁷ (Martínez, 2001, p. 29) using the *Fonocromoscop* system. Finally, another Spanish device, the *Filmófono*, should also be mentioned. This was a sound system created by Ricardo Urgoiti in collaboration with the renowned director Luis Buñuel (Gubern y Hammond, 2012, pág. 188-189). When it became obsolete, its creators used the name for one of the most important Spanish production companies during the period that began with the Second Republic and ended with the Spanish Civil War, when Urgoiti and Buñuel went into exile⁸.

3 The arrival of the Animatograph was advertised on 12 May 1896 in the Madrid newspaper *La Época*, the same year it was presented in Great Britain. In addition, the international début of the Cinematograph is recounted by the press in June 1895 (*El Correo Español*), and there are references to it being used for the first time in Spain just one year later (*La Época*, 14 May 1896). The Kinetoscope will be looked at in more detail in the relevant section of the article.

4 This was the case for systems such as the Biophonograph, the Chronophone, the Talking Cinematograph and the Orchestophone (Pulido & Utrera, 2001, p.162).

5 Some of the patents registered in Spain can be consulted in the historical database of the OEPM archive (Spanish Patent and Trademark Office), and include a “sound transmission device for talking film equipment”, filed by Walter Glenn Hammack in 1913, and a “improved arrangement to combine the talking machine or other sound reproduction machine with the animated images projection equipment”, by Alfonso Cortella in 1920.

6 The release date of the first Spanish sound picture, *El Misterio de la Puerta del Sol*, directed by Francisco Elías and produced by Feliciano Manuel Vítóres.

7 [Translated from the original.]

8 The *Filmófono*, despite its undeniable significance, will not be looked at in this article, as it was introduced to Spain

The Kinetophone

The Kinetophone was one of the first inventions to result from the quest to synchronise sound and moving images. It was presented by Edison's team in 1895; a team that (as previously mentioned) had spent the last few years of the 19th century attempting to create a system that combined these two elements. To create the Kinetophone, Edison made changes to his previous invention: the Kinetoscope. This system was released on the market in New York in 1894 (Arce, 2009, pág. 136), and consisted of cabinet roughly a metre high containing the spooling film strip. It had an individual peep-hole on the outside near the top which spectators could look through to see the images pass before their eyes. A year later, he created the Kinetophone based on this system, but modified "with a phonograph in the spot where the battery had previously been located" (Altman, 2004, pp. 81-82).

Before considering its reception in Spain, the confusion surrounding the term Kinetophone should be addressed, as this same word is used to refer to two different systems that were introduced almost fifteen years apart. The first Kinetophone was created by Edison in 1895 but was not particularly significant to the markets so its inventor put it to one side, taking it up again years later and presenting it in 1913. This updated version preserved the idea of synchronising music with moving images but this time projected onto canvas. The literature on these two systems throws up information relating to either one without distinguishing between them, so it is important to carefully check the dates to avoid confusion.

In Spain, the first references to the Kinetoscope in the printed press are from 1894, the same year it was officially presented in the United States, and there are reliable reports of screenings until at least the end of the following year (Arce, 2009 pág. 142). Despite the fact that the system only played moving images, Edison expressed his intention to complement this with sound early on in letters and interviews⁹ and it was soon picked up by the Spanish press:

Until now, the kinetoscope has been no more than a toy, but Edison proposes to improve it so it can project animated photographs onto a sheet with a magic lantern, and by combining the phonograph and the kinetoscope, make the photographed people speak and move in such a way that the audience in the room could hear, for example, a speech by a Member of Parliament at the same time as they see the movements used in their oratory¹⁰.

in 1930, after the time period within the scope of this article.

9 The most famous letter in which he makes a reference to music is reproduced in its entirety in DICKSON, W.K. Laurie: DICKSON, Antonia. *History of the Kinetograph, Kinetoscope, and Kinetophonograph*. New York: Crowell, 1895. At the start of this article, it is also transcribed from an interview with Edison in 1895.

10 [Translated from the original.] El Kinetoscopio, *La Unión Católica*, 30 March 1894

Numerous news items corroborate the arrival and use of the Kinetoscope in Spain¹¹, but the same cannot be said of the first version of the Kinetophone, as press reviews of this device that was invented and advertised in the United States in 1895 are non-existent with no information available until 1910; the decade in which the remodelled Kinetophone projector was presented.

The first incarnation of the Kinetophone never reached Spain for several reasons. The first, as already mentioned, is that a Kinetophone essentially consisted of a Kinetoscope connected to a Phonograph and so business owners may have thought it unnecessary to buy new and costly equipment as most already had the two components in their screening rooms. Several Spanish newspapers provide evidence that Kinetoscope shows were usually accompanied by a Phonograph, although as Julio Arce states: “despite the Kinetoscope and the Phonograph being together in the same space, it is difficult to establish whether there is any connection between the two devices”¹² (Arce, 2009 pág. 138).



Image 1. Press cutting of the front-page advertisement for Edison's Kinetoscope and Phonograph exhibition. *La Correspondencia de España*. 11 December 1895, no. 13,823, p. 1¹⁵.

Just like almost all the first forays into “talking movies” (as these early sound pictures were called in the United States), the Kinetophone was initially well received by the public, but this success lasted just a few short weeks and it subsequently fell into disuse. Added to this was the lack of accuracy and inferior quality of the synchronisation, which only roughly matched what was happening in the images and meant the invention was quickly forgotten. The fall in demand in the United States led Edison to try to enter the international market, but the *North American Phonograph Company* had filed a lawsuit against him in the following terms, according to the *New York Times* on 30 June 1895:

11 The following are some of the many sources that can be consulted: *El liberal* (Madrid), 28 May 1895, p.4; *El País* (Madrid) 19 July 1894, p.2; and *El Correo Español*, 10 April 1894, p.2.

12 [Translated from the original.]

13 <http://hemerotecadigital.bne.es/issue.vm?id=0000409996>, retrieved from the website of the Hemeroteca Digital, Biblioteca Nacional de España [Consulted: 4 January 2018].

The complaining Company holds an assignment from Edison of all foreign rights for the sale and use of the phonograph, with the exception when it is used in connection with toys, dolls, &c. They allege that Edison has infringed on the right by combining the phonograph and kineoscope under the name of kinetophone, and placing it in foreign market. The defense holds that the kinetophone is a toy (Wierzbicki, 2009, p. 74).

Edison wanted to avoid being dragged through the courts, and so temporarily put the idea of the Kinetophone and its export to one side, reviving it in the decade after 1910 when he modernised and improved its specifications and added a projector, which was essential to compete in the film market.

The “new” Kinetophone was presented in the United States in January 1913 when, despite having resolved many of the technical issues that plagued previous systems, Edison “failed because of a faulty exhibition strategy and outdated conception of film subject and format” (Altman, 2005, pág 358), and the fact that it was exclusively distributed to vaudeville theatres. Despite its extremely limited final commercialisation in the end, the international press picked up on the invention, writing about it three years before it was introduced, with witness accounts of the first Kinetophone tests in Edison’s studio even being found in Spain.

Edisson (sic.) has invented a new system, called the “Kinetophone”, in which the movement of the film strip is connected to the gramophone disc, establishing an isochrone mark, thanks to which figures from film are given words. This apparatus is not completely perfect, but the inventor hopes to make it so soon¹⁴.

This brief mention in the newspaper *El Día de Madrid* is not particularly reliable, as it mentions the Kinetophone being connected to gramophone discs, using “gramophone” as a generic term to express any piece of sound equipment even though in this case it must surely be a phonograph. Another prior and more technically accurate reference was printed in 1911 in the newspaper *La Hormiga de Oro*:

In this way, at the same time as the projector throws moving images onto the screen, the phonographic mechanism makes them speak, giving the spectator the illusion that they are living beings. [...] Those lucky enough to attend the first experiments in Edison’s laboratory confirm that the movements of the lips of the characters projected on the screen completely match the sounds issuing from the phonograph.

In a scene showing a game of cricket, each strike of the bat was accurately accompanied by the dry sound particular to it [...] ¹⁵.

14 [Translated from the original.] Por el mundo. Invento de Edisson. *El día de Madrid*, 12 September 1910, p.12

15 [Translated from the original.] Las maravillas del Kinetófono. *La Hormiga de oro*. 11 February 1911, p.96

From this news item it can be seen that the quality and accuracy of the synchronisation was measured by the sounds emitted by objects or the spoken word and not by the music. With the first Kinetophones, music had been used as a way to cover up a lack of synchronisation, and “instead of offering speeches or opera arias, the Kinetophone was regularly outfitted with films featuring dancers or marching bands” (Altman, 2004, p. 81). As such, one of the sought purposes of these new inventions was the ability to synchronise the spoken word so that the systems could be used to broadcast speeches by political figures, and specifically in terms of Edison’s own interests, plays and operas.

The Kinetophone arrived in Spain towards the end of 1913, and one of the first reports on it is the review by *El Imparcial* of a private screening in Madrid at a property belonging to the Count and Countess of Romanones:

In the ballroom of the hotel belonging to the Count and Countess of Romanones, before an audience of exceeding beauty and elegance, last night the new and prodigious invention of the brilliant Edison was unveiled and which is destined to revolutionise cinematography. [...] What was thought impossible has been achieved: completely simultaneous sound and image, giving the illusion that the characters speak and sing by themselves. A marvel. [...] When the interesting session ended and the lights went up, we felt doubly dazzled by both the electric rays being scattered around the room and the incomparable beauty of the young people brought together there by the Countess of Romanones¹⁶.

This clipping provides evidence that the Kinetophone which reached Spain in the 1910s was clearly Edison’s new model, as this was the version incorporating a projection system and the text specifies that the “lights went up”, presumably after being in the dark for the show. However, this was an isolated event, and the next time the Kinetophone was mentioned in the Spanish press was in commemorative publications recalling the inventor’s achievements on the date of his death¹⁷. It could be that the invention’s lack of success in the United States had negative consequences for its export potential and that the screening in Spain was simply seen as a scientific curiosity used by the Count and Countess of Romanones to entertain their guests.

16 [Translated from the original.] *El Imparcial*, 20 December 1913

17 Some of the articles are: “Una gran pérdida para la ciencia. Tomas Alva Edison ha muerto”, *La Energía Eléctrica*. 25 October 1931, no. 20, p. 12., and Las Grandes Fechas de Edison, *El Inventor* (Madrid). October 1931, no. 7, p.11.

The Chronophone

The Chronophone was initially designed by the French inventor León Gaumont, who patented it in July 1901. This early system “consisted in essence of a simple pairing – first mechanical, then electrical – of independent playback devices for film and sound” (Wierzbicki, 2009, p. 74). Unlike the Kinetophone, it was not originally a single viewer system but was designed to be able to project from the very beginning. In this case, the problems with the device were that it could only play short films of around twelve minutes, and the connection between the two systems was frequently lost. Aware of its limitations, Gaumont tried to improve his invention over the next few years, creating several models such as the Chronomegaphone, a term he used for the Chronophone model employed for projecting with sound in large venues (Herbert, 2000, pág. 4); and the Chronophone Mixte, which he introduced in 1908 and which appeared to solve the problem of synchronisation and amplification. Gaumont tried to sell his system in the United States during the 1910s, but the fierce competition and several technical failures and mistakes in his presentations hindered its progress (McMahan, 2002, pág. 69-70). Added to this, there was little investment in inventions related to cinema in Europe during the First World War, forcing Gaumont to focus his efforts on other ventures.

News of the Chronophone first reached Spain in 1903¹⁸, although these were simply reports or articles about inventions that were still to come. Two more years would pass before it debuted in the country thanks to the Zaragoza photographer Ignacio Coyne, who bought the use and distribution rights. He renamed it *Cine Parlante Coyne* (González López, 2005, pág. 47) [Coyne Talking Cinema] and used it to project “fragments of operas, Spanish operettas, dances, popular songs, duets, arias and comic skits”¹⁹ [Image 2] in a room on San Miguel street in his native city. Films were not exclusively imported; renowned Spanish directors such as Ricardo Baños, Antonio Tramullas and Fructuoso Gelabert produced films that used this system (González López, 2001, pág. 67).

18 “Crónica Científica. Inventos y Novedades”. *Ilustración artística*. 12 January 1903 p.14-15

19 [Translated from the original.]



Image 2. Poster advertising *Cine Parlante Coyne*, 1905. A representation of the Chronophone can be seen on the left of the image²⁰.

The Chronophone first appeared in the press with its original commercial name three years later -in 1906- when *La Vanguardia* announced the system's début in a venue on Barcelona's Rambla del Centro²¹:

Inauguration of the Chronophone, Gaumont's latest invention, an admirable cinematographic invention that plays the voice and movements in unison. The first and only one in Barcelona.

The Chronophone remained on the bill for four months until May that same year, and re-appeared in 1909 when it was advertised as the "improved talking device"²². News of the launch of the latest Chronophone did not reach Madrid until May 1912, but despite being late to cover it, several newspapers reported the success of its début, commenting that it was "the first time a film [is] repeated", and that "the Company had to use the 'Sold out' sign"²³. Notable among the films shown at the Madrid sessions was one featuring *cuplés* [short, light-hearted songs] from the Spanish operetta *El perro chico*, sung by the famous *cuplés* artist Consuelo Tamayo, known as *la Tortajada*. The *cuplé* was widely used in these types of films just as it would be with the later Phonofilm, as both the musical style and the performers were a big draw for audiences. Success was largely due to the fact that the same venues were used to hear *cuplés* and to watch films, making this a cheap way for audiences to enjoy their favourite singers and *cuplés* artists "live".

20 Image from the DARA Archive (Documents and Archives of Aragón), Zaragoza Provincial Council, reproduced with permission of the GAZA project (Gran Archivo Zaragoza Antigua) <http://adioszaragoza.blogspot.com.es/>

21 [Translated from the original.] *La Vanguardia*, Sunday, 15 February 1906, p.11

22 [Translated from the original.] *La Vanguardia*, Monday, 14 July 1909, p.5

23 [Translated from the original.] *El Heraldo de Madrid*, 23 May 1912, p.4; *La Correspondencia de España*, 24 May 1912, p.4

The Phonofilm

The Phonofilm was one of the main sound picture systems during the 1920s. The invention was presented in 1923 by Lee de Forest in New York theatres Rivoli and Rialto under the auspices of musical director Hugo Riesenfeld. Like most inventions of this era, it enjoyed great success when it made its *début* but was quickly forgotten (Altman, 2004 pág. 178). Nevertheless, the technology he used, which recorded sound on the film strip itself, set the precedent for subsequent sound-on-film systems still used to this day (Chion, 1997, p. 67). The Phonofilm reached Spain in 1927, five years after being presented in the United States, which coincided with the screening of the aforementioned sound picture *The Jazz Singer* in American theatres²⁴. Even so, the Spanish press widely reported the activities and demonstrations carried out across the country in reviews that referred to the Phonofilm as “the marvellous invention [...] that solves the problem of talking films”²⁵, and “an extremely interesting invention”²⁶.

Although many newspapers heaped words of praise and astonishment on the new system, some less positive reports can be found, such as the example from *El Heraldo de Madrid*, which emphasises the scientific value of the device but also states that “it has not yet reached the level of perfection necessary to be truly artistic in nature”, and specifically highlights the following flaws in the sound quality:

Furthermore, apart from the major problem with reverberation, which so affects listening to anything through speakers, the system’s biggest drawback is that by bringing all the waves together simultaneously into one, which is recorded, it is then impossible to untangle them. This gives a result which is always confusing and makes it impossible to distinguish the different timbres from each other as should be the case²⁷.

Equally, due to early technical problems and the short length of the films it was able to play, Phonofilm was not initially considered a potential replacement for silent film, but was thought of as a complementary form of entertainment to be used at screening sessions or in the theatre, and was known as “a beautiful show to end the party”²⁸. The length of the films available could not compare to silent films and a Phonofilm session was generally made up of several short films including “sections of opera and Spanish operettas, songs, concerts, speeches, dialogues, [which were] reproduced; seeing and hearing the charac-

24 The liberties journalists took with the names of the recently arrived systems in their columns and reviews should be noted. There are therefore references to the name in English, Phonofilm, in the press of the time as well as several translations into Spanish. The most literal of these is *Fonofilm* (replacing *ph* with the more Spanish *f* which is closer in pronunciation) but there were also freer translations such as *Cinefón* or *Cinéfono*.

25 [Translated from the original.] *El Sol* (Madrid), 9 October 1927, p.8

26 [Translated from the original.] *El Imparcial* (Madrid) 5 October 1927, p.5

27 [Translated from the original.] *El Heraldo de Madrid*, 2 March 1927, p.4

28 [Translated from the original.] Pasa la cinta. El Fonofilm y su inventor Dr Lee de Forest. *Popular Film*, 14 July 1927, p.13

ters and orchestras as if they were on the stage at the same time as the projection”²⁹. Several journalists also sowed doubt about the viability of the invention, as explained in the magazine *Popular Film* in an extensive and critical report by Antonio Suárez with a title that revealed these concerns: *Lee de Forest and his Phonofilm: will this invention be worth it?*³⁰. Another criticism levied at this invention (and at sound pictures in general), was the issue of the linguistic difficulties and limitations it would bring, as, according to a report in 1927 in the *La Revista de Oro* dedicated to the *Phonofilm*:

[...] foreign films, for example, could not be shown in Spain, because only a tiny number of the audience would understand what the actors are saying, and having replaced the current listings, bills should consist exclusively of Spanish films that can be understood by everyone. Translation does not work because if we see an actor on the screen talking in English or German, when we get swept up in the scene and hear the voice through a phonographic translation in Spanish it will be an unpleasant surprise to see that the movement of their lips does not match the words that reach our ears and will destroy the whole effect of the action.³¹

As previously mentioned, the Phonofilm was officially presented in Spain in 1927, but this was not the first time the system was mentioned in the Spanish press. On 15 December 1923, the newspaper *La Época* published an extensive review reporting the début of the Phonofilm on the other side of the Atlantic:

We believe the Phonofilm’s role is none other than to complete film by enhancing its natural resources for expression. For example, we have all seen how deflated, how unintelligible, how dead a dance appears on screen. Without the sustaining commentary provided by music, movements lose their gracious eloquence. Illustrate the projection with a Chopin waltz or some authentic sevillanas, not with an orchestra but using a system that ensures synchronisation, and the effect is absolutely beautiful³².

This was an isolated mention in the newspapers at the start of the twenties which meant the invention could be presented a few years later as a new system, as it had not previously been widely reported in the Spanish press.

The Phonofilm was promoted in Spain in 1927 by its inventor, Lee de Forest. It is reasonable to assume that the timing of its arrival in Spain was due to the fact that the inventor had started to look for new markets across the Atlantic following its moment of glory in the United States and subsequent fruitless presentations in Cuba and Mexico (Fernández Colorado, 1995). The inventor may also have decided to present his invention in Spain because

29 [Translated from the original.] *La Libertad* (Madrid) 12 October 1927, p.6

30 [Translated from the original.] Lee de Forest y su Fonofilm ¿Valdrá la pena este invento? *Popular Film*, 10 November 1927, p.4

31 [Translated from the original.]

32 [Translated from the original.] *La Voz en el cinematógrafo. El Fonofilm. La Época*, 15 December 1923, p.5

some of the films already produced using the system starred the singer and actress Concha Piquer, who was a big star in the United States in the twenties. These films, despite being produced for the North American audience, were acted in Spanish and made cultural references to Spain, so could be expected to be well received on the peninsula.

It should be noted that despite confirmation that Concha Piquer's films date from 1923 (Vernon y Peiró, 2012, pág. 295), in several press interviews both she and Lee de Forest date them to 1925³³. They may have agreed to bring forward the original recording date to make the invention seem more relevant, as a delay of two years before its presentation was acceptable, but five would have made it obvious that it was no longer a recent innovation. An inventor coming to Spain to promote his own system was unusual, and conflicts between celebrities in the world of show business in search of stardom soon followed. One example appears in the news published by the *Heraldo de Madrid*, whose expansive title reads:

Collision of the Stars

Conchita Piquer says she made films for phonofilm before Raquel Meller.

Forest, inventor of the phonofilm, confirms Conchita Piquer is right

Raquel Meller says she does not know Mr Forest³⁴

In spite of the questions the invention raised in the press, and following several private demonstrations of the Phonofilm system, Lee de Forest managed to convince a group of Spanish entrepreneurs to sell his system in Spain. They bought the rights to it and created the *Hispano de Forest Phonofilm* company (Arce, 2009b, pág. 641, 642). Over the course of two years they organised screenings in several cities in Spain in which they showed the short films made by Lee de Forest in the United States and others produced domestically. Two years later, *Hispano de Forest Phonofilm*, already in crisis after garnering little success with audiences, made a final investment to try to keep the company afloat by producing the first feature-length Spanish sound picture, *El misterio de la puerta del sol* (1929). Box office figures were low, it was strongly criticised in the press and, despite incorporating some technical improvements, it brought the final curtain down on Phonofilm in Spain.

33 VALVERDE, Salvador. VALVERDE, Salvador. Conchita Piquer, estrella de la pantalla y de la escena frívola, nos habla del "cine", de las "varietés" y del amor... *Crónica*, 11 May 1930, p.14; Colisión de Estrellas, *El Heraldo de Madrid*, 1 March 1927.

34 [Translated from the original.] *Ibid.*

Conclusions

Numerous inventions and new film systems that purported to offer revolutionary sound picture shows arrived in Spain at the start of the 20th century. World-famous inventors such as Edison, Gaumont and De Forest sold their innovations in the country, preceded by the at times excessive enthusiasm of the Spanish press. Nevertheless, most of these systems were quickly forgotten by the public just a few weeks after they were presented.

Audiences' disillusionment with these devices was due to a combination of factors: the lack of accuracy and inferior quality of the sound synchronisation, frequent mistakes when setting up the apparatus and the short length of the films themselves. The public's high expectations also did not help; the films were seen as shabby compared to the modernity of silent films, which were enjoying their so-called "golden age" at the time. The material these systems played was often fragments of Spanish operettas, *cuplés*, comic sketches and other items similar to those on the bill at the vaudeville theatres popular at the start of the century. By using this content, the first sound pictures sought to emulate the fashionable shows of the day, with the added value that they could provide the stars of the time on the screen even if the venue was small. Nevertheless, and unfortunately for investors, this early cinema became no more than an anecdotal element used to complement classic film projections; one whose costs also vastly outweighed any profits that could be made for business owners.

This article has tried to establish a theoretical framework for the first sound systems in Spain based on press cuttings from the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century with the aim of being a platform for future research into music practices in filmic spaces during the period prior to the arrival of sound pictures.

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