

Miró's Music

By Judy Cantor-Navas

In 1966, the pioneering American jazz producer Norman Granz brought Duke Ellington and his trio to play in the sculpture garden at the Maeght Foundation for art on the French Riviera. Granz was producing a jazz documentary called *Improvisation*, and this was a perfect opportunity for a scene that captured the freedom of both music and visual art by two 20th Century giants. Miró's sculpture can be seen dancing in the background while Ellington sits at a piano in the open air on a sunny day. Miró himself was captured standing behind the band as he enjoys the private show.

Miró's constant connection with music can be felt throughout his work. One painting that now hangs in Barcelona's Joan Miró Foundation is titled *Chanson sur fond blanc – Song on a White Background*. Miró painted it the same year as that brief encounter with Ellington. The modern master's abstract paintings vibrate with colors and shapes. Among his early works are paintings of flamenco dancers.

Music was a constant companion for the artist, as chronicled in *Miró & Music*, a revealing book written by the artist's grandson, Joan Punyet Miró.

In his studios in Barcelona, Paris and Palma de Mallorca, Miró was always listening to music, and his circle of friends in the avant-garde always included musicians as well as poets and painters, with a special link to others for whom music was an important inspiration, like Alexander Calder and Wassily Kandinsky. Living in Paris in the 1930s, Miró hung out with a group that included Joseph Reinhardt, brother of iconic jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt.

In the book, Punyet notes that in a letter to a friend written in 1926, his grandfather, who loved flamenco as well as swing music, described a night searching for a flamenco show in downtown Barcelona, and disappointedly, only finding venue

after venue where people were dancing the Charleston, then the current international craze.

It's well known that Miró, like his contemporaries Picasso and Dalí, created backdrops for ballet and theater. But the works of Miró also grace the covers of record albums, including Dave Brubeck's *Time Further Out*. He often created covers for musicians he befriended and admired, particularly the composers of the experimental instrumental music that intrigued him.

In the 1950s, Miró went to New York for the first time. As Punyet recounts in the book, legend has it that the photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson invited him to hear a gospel concert in a Harlem Church, igniting his interest in the great singer Mahalia Jackson and other black American artists.

When Miró died in 1989, at the age of 90, he left behind an extensive and eclectic record collection as well as his famous body of work.

As this playlist attests, his taste knew no borders, and his obsessions ranged from roots music to the most cutting edge sounds. The music he embraced was both spiritual and experimental, and always inspirational.

LINKS:

Miró's Music playlist

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/56QmLYSR0ubmZStzvzvjd?si=8e01495cc07a408b>

Duke Ellington, "Blues for Miró" video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0CZWq0YiM_U