

**TAKING ETHNOGRAPHIC PHOTOS:  
KURT SCHINDLER’S FIELDWORKS ON SPANISH POPULAR SONGS  
1920S AND 1930S<sup>1</sup>**

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Abstract

The German musician Kurt Schindler (1887-1935) was also a famous photographer who worked for several newspapers in Spain and in the United States. He was commissioned by Columbia University (NY) and several Spanish research institutions in 1920 to do a fieldwork on popular folksongs in all over the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal) until his earlier death in the 30s.

He solved some problems taking white and black photos on Spanish dances with his earlier experience on Russian fieldworks before the I World War.

His photographic legacy has still not been catalogued completely. A further research on this photo collection is needed in order to show, to the scientific community, the unique of his ethnographic recollection.



*The Schola Cantorum of New York, Kurt Schindler, Conductor, Which Presented Pizzetti's "Threnody for Hippolytus," From the Opera "Phedra," for Unaccompanied Double Chorus and Mezzo-Soprano, at Carnegie Hall, Wednesday Evening*

With this paper I want to point it out one of the task of the musician Kurt Schindler (1887-1935), composer, piano and organ performer, chorus director, musicologist, folk songs collector and ethnomusicologist, who is well-known for his editions on Spanish and Russian songs. The task I want to show is his role as photographer. In the twenty one English, German and Spanish music dictionaries and encyclopaedias, published since 1920 until nowadays, where we can have information about this artist (*cf.* in the bibliography of this article), in any of them we can have an explanation about his photographic collection.

<sup>1</sup> This article has been made with the research I+D “La canción popular en los trabajos de campo, fuente de inspiración para la composición musical”. Entidad financiadora: Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación. Referencia HAR2010-15165 (2010-2013). Proyectos de Investigación I+D+i (Programa Nacional de Proyectos de Investigación Fundamental).

How can we know he was a photographer? Since there isn't any complete catalogue of his work, we have to check in international libraries, archives, magazines and newspapers to find all the information.

Firstly, there are all the photos he made for *The New York Times* illustrating music articles, where is always indicated he is a photographer<sup>2</sup>:



Irving Fineman.  
(Photo by Kurt Schindler.)

Secondly, the existence of, at least, two series of Schindler's Photos. One, in the collection of Kurt Schindler Papers in the New York Public Library. The other one, in the library of the Hispanic Society of America.

Thirdly, there are testimonies of Schindler's contemporary artist who testify he was well known as a photographer.

#### THE COLLECTION OF KURT SCHINDLER'S PHOTOGRAPHS

In The New York Public, Arts Division, there is a collection named Kurt Schindler Papers<sup>3</sup>. All the collection was donated by the artist Liljan Espenak, friend of Ewald Schindler, the only brother of Kurt Schindler and his heir. The photographs are named with n° 6, boxes 12 and 13, folders 1 to 40 (signatures [MAI-7218] to 16 [MAI-7330]). Although in the catalogue this series is described as

<sup>2</sup> I want to thank here all the help from Prof. Dr. Silke Leopold and Dr. Joachim Steinheuer, from the musicology department of the University of Heidelberg, for giving me the opportunity of researching in the library of their department last May and June 2012 and using all the facilities for American newspapers' database.

<sup>3</sup> The signature is: <[http://nypl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/11992491052\\_kurt\\_schindler\\_papers](http://nypl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/11992491052_kurt_schindler_papers)>. [Consulted 1st November 2012].

personal photographs of Kurt Schindler, Vera Androuchevitch (his wife), the Androuchevitch family, Ewald Schindler and his wife Nora Nikisch, a few other friends, and a number of unidentified women (possibly family friends), I have found very interesting photos from Kurt Schindler’s field work in Russia and Spain. All these photos are his personal legacy; according to his will, all of them were given to Ewald Schindler<sup>4</sup>; I want to point out the ones from social events and opera’s performing (with costumes as for *Aida*)<sup>5</sup> and several artist’s photos with personal dedicatives<sup>6</sup> (as the ones from the French composer Albert Roussel, the Czech operatic soprano Emm Destinn, the Swedish operatic contralto Karin Branzell, Dr. Wladimir Zelensky or S. Ramevsky).

The other big bulk of Kurt Schindler’s photographs are kept in the Hispanic Society of America (HSA), in New York City. They belong to the collection of Prints and Photos of the HSA<sup>7</sup>. As they say, this section of photographs contains over 176.000 black and white images documenting Hispanic art, culture, and customs in all over Spain and part of Latin America countries, from 1850 onwards (stopping in 1960s). During the 1920s, Hispanic Society curators (as Ruth Anderson<sup>8</sup>) travelled throughout these regions photographing urban and rural scenes, thereby preserving a way of life from those days, which are nowadays very interesting documents. As it is indicated in Kurt Schindler’s will, the artist made Ewald Schindler his only heir, and he didn’t give to the HAS his photograph collection<sup>9</sup>; why the collection is there, is just a mystery for us now. All the photographic records of the HSA by Kurt Schindler are very valid documents to show some of the traditions and customs of the decades of the '20s and '30s; they show us different landscapes and personalities of the time, along with other anonymous others who played a more or less relevant to him at that time but not stopped being incidental characters that over time has forgotten. The photos are taken in Europe, mainly Spain and Portugal, but also in France, Hungary, Czech Republic, Austria, Egypt, Syria or Morocco. The big amount of them is 597 photos, belonged to the period 25th/November/1028 to 1<sup>st</sup>/May/1935, which are

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<sup>4</sup> Cfr. <[http://nypl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/11992491052\\_kurt\\_schindler\\_papers](http://nypl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/11992491052_kurt_schindler_papers)>. [Consulted 1st November 2012].

<sup>5</sup> Cfr., for example, [MAI-7219] to [MAI-7222].

<sup>6</sup> I want to show the photo from the box 12, folder 5b of both Schindler’s brothers with the dedicatory by his sister-in-law Nora: “Meinen Lieben Kurt zum Andenken, an seinen ersten Resüch bei ins. In geschwister bilder Zuneigung/ Nora/ Leipzig, in Juli 1921”.

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. <[http://www.hispanicsociety.org/hispanic/prints\\_photos.htm](http://www.hispanicsociety.org/hispanic/prints_photos.htm)>. [Consulted 1st November 2012].

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. the doctoral dissertation on this subject by Noemi Espinosa Fernández, <<https://www.educacion.gob.es/teseo/imprimirFicheroTesis.do?fichero=25187>>. [Consulted 1st November 2012].

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. this wrong affirmation in Patrick Lanagham (2007). “La formación de una colección fotográfica de Castilla-La Mancha: Monumentos, tipos y trajes”. Lucía Crespo Jiménez, Rafael Villena Espinosa (eds). *Fotografías y Patrimonio II. Encuentro en Castilla-La Mancha*. Ciudad Real: Centro de Estudios de Castilla-La Mancha.

classified with the GRFNumber 165001 to 165598 (negatives numbers 49001 to 49598). The countries and places photographed in this collection are the following<sup>10</sup>:

**Austria** (1934: Eisenerz, Viena).

**Czech Republic** (1934: Praga).

**Egypt** (1932: Alexandria, The Barrages Al-Kanater, Cairo, Giza, Karnak, Luxor, Sakkara, Teves).

**France** (1929: Biarritz, Capbreton-Landes, Font-Romeau, Hendaya, Hossegar, Lês Bouyllouses, Llevia, Saint-Jean-de Luz, Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, Sargasonne, Socoa). (1931: Paris). (1932: Paris).

**Gibraltar** (1934)

**Israel** (1932: Haifa, Jerusalém, Nahariya, Rishon LeZion, Tel Aviv)

**Hungary** (1934: Budapest, Mohacs).

**Lebanon** (1932: Beirut).

**Morocco** (1929: Tetouan, Xanen). (1931: Marrakech, Tangier, Tetouan, Rabat)

**Palestine** (1932: Bethlehem, Jericho).

**Portugal** (1929: Braga, Oporto) (1932: Batalha, Braganza, Chaves, Coimbra, Miranda do Douro, Mirandela, Tuizelo, Valpaços, Vinhais). (1935: Alcobaca, Batalha, Braganza, Estoril, Cascaes, Chaves, Lamego, Lisbon, Mirandela, Montalegre, Sintra, Tomar, Tuizelo, Viseu).

**România** (1934: Brazov, Bucarest, Curtea de Arges, Ploesti, Radanti-Soreivita, Sona, Sinaia).

**Spain** (1928-1935)

-Almería (1929: Cuevas de Vera, Berja).

-Asturias (1929: Brañas de Arriba, Cangas de Narcea, Cudillero, Gijón, Lastres, Luarca, Mieres, Naranco, Puerto de Pajares, San Juan de Amandi, San Salvador de Priesca, Santa Cristina de Lena, Santa María del Naranco, Salas, Valdediós, Vallado, Villaviciosa). (1932: Arenas de Cabrales, Llanes, Ribadesella, Villaviciosa).

-Ávila (1929: Ávila, Cuevas del Valle, El Barco de Ávila, Mombledrán, Navalcas, Navarredonda de la Sierra, Parador de Gredos, Puerto del Pico, Ramacastañas). (1932: Arenas de San Pedro, Ávila, Barco de Ávila, Guisando, Hoyacasero, Mombledrán, Navalongilla, Navalosa, Navarrevisca, Parador de Gredos, Pedro Bernardo, Piedralabes, San Martín de Pimpollar, Santa Cruz del Valle, Solana de Béjar).

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<sup>10</sup> Cfr. the maps in: Juan Carlos Montoya Rubio; Matilde Olarte Martínez (2012a). Cuando los epistolarios eran redes sociales. Aproximación a las conexiones de Kurt Schindler a través de sus correspondientes. *Fuentes documentales interdisciplinarias para el estudio del Patrimonio y la Oralidad en España*. Baiona: Dos Acordes.

- Badajoz (1929: Badajoz, Barcarrosa, Don Benito, Fregenal de la Sierra, Jerez de los Caballeros, Magacela, Medellín, Mérida, Villanueva de la Serena, Zafra). (1932: Badajoz, Herrera del Duque, Olivenza).
- Barcelona (1930: Barcelona, Garraf).
- Burgos (1929: Pancorbo). (1930: Aranda de Duero, Barbadillo del Pez, Coruña del Conde, Peñaranda de Duero, Rabanera). (1932: La Aguilera, Lerma, Villarcayo).
- Cádiz (1929. Alcalá de los Gazules, Algeciras, Rota). (1931: Puerto de Santa María).
- Cáceres (1929: Cáceres, Cañamero, Guadalupe, Logrosán, Miajadas, Plasencia, Trujillo). (1932: Alcántara, Arroyo del Puerco, Cáceres, Coria, Cuacos, Garganta de la Olla, Jarandilla de la Vera, Piornal, Plasencia, San Martín de Trevejo, Trujillo).
- Ciudad Real (1929: Argamasilla de Alba, Tomelloso, Pedro Muñoz).
- Córdoba (1929: Lucena).
- Coruña (1929: Betanzos, Puentedeume, Santiago de Compostela).
- Cuenca (1929: Alarcón, Belmonte, Buendía, Carrasposa del Campo, Cuenca, Huete, Villaescusa de Haro).
- Gerona (1929: Cerdaña, Puigcerdá, Vic).
- Guipuzcoa (1929: Igueldo, San Sebastián, Zaldívar, Zumaya).
- Granada (1929: El Haza del Lino, Granada, Lanjarón, Orjiva, Purullena, Ugíjar, Yegen). (1930: Granada). (1931: Granada).
- Guadalajara (1928: Sigüenza). (1929: Alhóndiga, Mondéjar, Pastrana, Sacedón, Yebra). (1930: Auñón, Guadalajara, Tendilla). (1932: Alcolea del Pinar).
- Huelva (1929: Aracena, Aroche, Cortegana, Niebla).
- Huesca (1930: Ansó, Ayerbe, Huesca, Jaca, Loarre, Riglos, San Juan de la Peña, Santa Cruz de la Serós).g
- Jaén (1932: Jaén).
- León (1929: Astorga, Campo Sagrado, Destriana, El Villar de Santiago, Laciana, Láncara de Luna, Las Huergas de Babia, Leitariegos, León, Lorenzana, Los Barrios de Luna, Lumago de Laciana, Morales de Arcediano, Oseja de Sajambre, Piedrafita de Babia, Portillo de la Reina, Puente de las Palomas, Puerto de Piedrafita (Benuza), Riaño, San Emiliano de Babia, Soto de Sajambre, Torrebarrio de Babia, Villablino, Villafeliz de Luna, Villafranca del Bierzo, Villasecino de Babia).
- Logroño (1928: Fuenmayor). (1929: Entrena, Islallana, Logroño, Nájera, Soto en Cameros, Torrecilla en Cameros). (1930: Blacos, Desfiladero de las Goteras, Ortigosa de Cameros, Torreblacos, Villar del Campo, Villoslada de Cameros, Viniegra de Arriba, Viniegra de Abajo).
- Madrid (1928: Madrid, Sigüenza) (1929: Alcalá de Henares, Batres, Canillejas, El Escorial, La Olmeda de la Cebolla, Madrid, Manzanares el Real, Navacerrada, Navalcarnero, Patones, San Martín de Valdeiglesias). (1930: Aranjuez, Madrid). (1931: Madrid). (1932: Buitrago, El Paular, Madrid, Santorcaz, Somaen). (1935: Madrid).
- Málaga (1929: Antequera, Archidona, Coín, La Caleta de Vélez, Málaga, Nerja, Torre del Mar, Torremolinos, Torrox, Villanueva de La Concepción).
- Murcia (1929: Almendricos, Cartagena, Lorca, Murcia).
- Navarra (1928: Tudela). (1930: Aibar, Gazólaz, Javier, Ochagavía, Olite, Pamplona, Puerto de las Coronas, Rocafuerte, Roncal, Sangüesa, Tafalla, Ustárrroz).
- Palencia (1932: Torquemada).
- Salamanca (1929: Béjar, Candelario, Salamanca). (1932: Cabeza de Framontanos, La Alberca, Ledesma, Salamanca, Trabanca, Villaflores, Villarino).

- Santander (1929: San Vicente de la Barquera, Santillana del Mar, Polanco). (1932: Cabezón de la Sal, Castro Urdiales, Escalante, Laredo, Torrelavega, Ruiloba, San Vicente de la Barquera).
- Segovia (1929: La Granja, Montuerga, Segovia). (1932: Pedraza, Sepúlveda, Turégano).
- Sevilla (1928: Alcalá de Guadaira, Arahál, Carmona, Écija, Marchena, Osuna, Sevilla). (1929: Alcalá de Guadaira, Carmona, Guadix). (1931: Sevilla). (1935: Sevilla).
- Soria (1930: Ágreda, Alcubilla de Avellaneda, Almazán, Bellosillo, Berlanga de Duero, Blacos, Bocigas de Perales, Borobia, Calatañazor, Castillfrío de la Sierra, Cenego, Cidones, Cueva de Ágreda, Duruelo de la Sierra, El Burgo de Osma, Fuentearmegil, Fuentecambón, Fuentesaz de Soria, Golmayo, Hinojosa de la Sierra, La Cuenca, Montenegro de Cameros, Mirador de la Cuesta de la Galiana, Ocenilla, Ólvega, Peñalcázar, Reznos, San Andrés de Soria, San Esteban de Gormaz, San Leonardo de Yagüe, San Pedro Manrique, San Pedro Manrique, Santervás del Burgo, Soria, Sotillo del Rincón, Torrearévalo, Torreblacos, Ucero, Villaciervitos, Villálvaro, Villar de Campo, Villar del Río, Vinuesa, Yanguas, Zayas de la Torre, Zayuelas). (1932: Alcolea del Pinar, Almarail, Arbujuelo, Gómara, Layna, Medinaceli, Monteagudo de las Vicarias, Morón de Almazán, Salinas de Medinaceli, Santa María de la Huerta, Serón de Nágima, Serón de Nágima, Urex de Medinaceli, Yelo).
- Tarragona (1930: Poblet, Santes Creus).
- Teruel (1930: Albarracín, Bronchales, Orihuela del Tremedal, Teruel). (1932: Martín del Río).
- Toledo (1929: Ajofrín, Layos, Maqueda, Navalcán, Toledo). (1930: Chinchón, Olias del Rey, Toledo). (1932: Maqueda, Navalcán, Oropesa, Talavera de la Reina, Toledo). (1935: Toledo).
- Valencia (1930: Sagunto).
- Valladolid (1929: Medina del Campo, Tordesillas, Valladolid).
- Vitoria (1928: Vitoria).
- Vizcaya (1932: Portugalete).
- Zamora (1929: Campillo, Campos, Muelas del Pan, San Pedro de la Nave, Toro, Zamora). (1932: Alcañices, Requejo, Fermoselle, San Martín del Pedroso, Tejas de Aliste).
- Zaragoza (1930: Tarazona).

**Syria** (1932: Anti-Lebanon, Damascus)

#### TESTIMONIES ABOUT KURT SCHINDLER AS PHOTOGRAPHER

The first person who wrote about the role of Kurt Schindler as photographer was Olin Downes (1886-1955), American music critic with *The Boston Post* (1906-1924) and *The New York Times* (1924-1955); he had a very fruitful career as a music critic and lecturer as well as his involvement with major music organizations.

I want to show here two testimonies he wrote, in *The New York Times*, about the genius of Schindler for looking for the musical and cultural situation and describing us without a note, just with his photos<sup>11</sup>:

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<sup>11</sup> *Cfr.* in the web page of the newspaper, the article from 8th/December/1935.

He was much interested in photography, and happiest of all countries, in Spain. He loved the Spanish nature. He could speak most of the dialects, and consort on equal terms with the simple people, whom he preferred to most others. On a certain jaunt in a wild mountainous country Schindler provided a spectacle for the gods.

This was the picture: Schindler standing, focusing a camera, his heels on the edge of a precipice. In front of Schindler, a peasant hut and a grandmother, immense and black-bearded, who fascinated him. While he was preparing to take the grandmother, a hen obstructed itself upon the scene, necessitating a new grouping. A dog interfered at this crucial moment. Attempted readjustment of the group. In turn two children emerged, and after them two pigs. Schindler was beside himself. The question, consuming literally hours of experiment, was how to compose the group. “He dominated the grandmother”, said a friend, who told the story, “and he dominated the children. But he could not dominate the hen, the dog and the pigs. There is no describing what he went through in the effort to get what he wanted in his photograph”. Schindler was exigent when absorbed in his objectives, and utterly inconsiderate of everybody, including himself

Another important testimony is how he was concerned of the real Spanish spirit, leaving the Andalusian and gipsy taste and looking for the other side of the real soul; this was the result of his numerous field work though over Spain, recollecting folk songs, taking photos either the singers, dancers, manifestations and processions, or either the churches, villages and localities where the information came from. He was one of the most important informant about Spanish popular culture of the 1920s and 1930s. Olin Bownes gave this report after one get-together with Schindler in Madrid in the 30s:

On a night in Madrid Schindler secured singers and dancers to entertain his guests, but soon dismissed the “artists” angrily, as unworthy of their pretensions. He sat on his balcony under the moon and talked, which was better than the dancers. Later he showed photographs. They were revelations, in many cases works of art, which not only reflected but interpreted the mysterious land of Spain.

And it was thus, for the first time, that we saw the forms of the marvellous stone bulls of Guisando –the flock that stands as if feeding in a field in Ávila, and which, through dated by archaeologists as from the Iron Age, seems to have stood there since time immemorial, as if created concurrently with the ground. Reader, you see those amazing sculptures, and, if you never realized it before, you know that sculpture may be more living than life itself. Who made those forms? For what purposes? Obviously none but the naive and incomparable representation of life, here created in stone, with a godlike unconsciousness and power. If you want to stand abashed in the presence of art, go and look for a minute or a day at those incredible creatures. When you see them, you will see God, a thing which Schindler very well knew, and had chronicled with the camera.

Just for finishing, I want to show the only article published about Schindler as photographer. It belongs to the photograph catalogue *Viajes de ida y vuelta. Fotografías de Castilla-La Mancha en The*

*Hispanic Society of America* (Ciudad Real, Centro de Estudios de Castilla-La Mancha, 2007)<sup>12</sup>, and it is the first short study of this activity.

We hope this one will be not only the second one, but the introduction of further studies to this important collection of ethnographic richness.



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<sup>12</sup> Cfr. <[http://www.uclm.es/ceclm/fotografia\\_hispanic/fotografos/schindler.htm](http://www.uclm.es/ceclm/fotografia_hispanic/fotografos/schindler.htm)> [Consulted 1st November 2012].



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