

# Bernard Gordillo Brockmann

bernardgordillo@gmail.com

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## ABSTRACT

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the countries of Central America incorporated European musicians into their state-generated projects. Administrations from Guatemala to Costa Rica appointed composers from Italy, Germany, Belgium, and Spain to help stimulate national musical culture and education, giving them leadership roles in state institutions. Belgian composer and conductor Alejandro Cousin arrived in the late 1850s and spent the rest of his life in El Salvador and Nicaragua where he established the national military band. This article, in the form of an obituary, sheds light on his noteworthy artistic legacy in Central America.

## KEY WORDS

Alejandro Cousin, cosmopolitanism, military band, Nicaragua, Central America.

## TÍTULO

Cosmopolitanismo musical en América Central: en busca de un obituario de Alejandro Cousin

## RESUMEN

Durante la segunda mitad del Siglo XIX, los países de América Central integraron músicos europeos a sus proyectos de construcción estatal. Desde Guatemala hasta Costa Rica se contrataron compositores de Italia, Alemania, Bélgica y España en posiciones de liderazgo en instituciones del estado. El compositor y director belga Alejandro Cousin llegado a América a finales de la década de 1850, permaneció gran parte del resto de su vida en servicio gubernamental en El Salvador y en Nicaragua, donde estableció la banda militar nacional. Este artículo, a manera de obituario, ilustra su importante legado artístico en esta región.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Alejandro Cousin, cosmopolitanismo, bandas militares, Nicaragua, América Central.

Bernard Gordillo Brockmann nació en Nicaragua y se desempeña como Research Associate del Center for Iberian and Latin American Music (CILAM), University of California, Riverside. Ph.D. de la University of California (Riverside) e instrumentista de Indiana University (Bloomington), el Guildhall School of Music and Drama (Londres) y el Centenary College of Louisiana (Shreveport). Premiado con el Ingolf Dahl Memorial Award y la Fundación Fulbright, ha participado como ponente en reuniones de la Society for American Music, American Musicological Society y Society for Ethnomusicology.

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# Musical Cosmopolitanism in Central America: In search of an Obituary of Alejandro Cousin (ca. 1835–1910)

Bernard Gordillo Brockmann

## Introduction

In one of his many chronicles for the Argentine newspaper *La Nación*, Rubén Darío (1867–1916), celebrated Nicaraguan *modernista* poet and essayist, wrote a memoir of his trip to Belgium in April of 1907.<sup>1</sup> Among the individuals he highlighted was Blanca Cousin Oudart de Zelaya (1875–1957), wife of Nicaraguan president José Santos Zelaya López (1853–1919).<sup>2</sup> Born in Namur, Belgium, Cousin had left the country as a child along with her family, subsequently living in Central America, where she rose in status as part of Nicaraguan society.<sup>3</sup> At length, the poet showered her and Zelaya with praise, both whom he had known for a number of years. He also paid tribute to an elder member of their family: “My home country owes much of its artistic progress to her father, Mr. Cousin.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Leonora Saavedra for her guidance and suggestions on this article; Jorge Eduardo Arellano for providing beneficial source material; the administration and staff of the Instituto de Historia de Nicaragua y Centroamérica (IHNCA, Managua) for their generous support over many years; and the University of California Institute for Mexico and the United States (UC MEXUS) for the residency that allowed for the completion of this article. The chronicle appeared over two essays; see Rubén Darío, “Vida belga”, *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, May 17, 1907; and “Vida belga”, *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, Jun. 9, 1907.

<sup>2</sup> “Blanche Marie Therese Alexandra Cousin”, Oct. 16, 1875, in *Belgium, Births and Baptisms, 1560–1890*, FamilySearch.com, accessed Dec. 21, 2012, [database access limited to subscription].

<sup>3</sup> *Guía ilustrada del estado de Nicaragua*, Rome: Oficina Poligráfica Romana, 1898, p. 13. Blanca Cousin arrived in Nicaragua on December 6, 1884.

<sup>4</sup> “Vida belga”, *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, Jun. 9, 1907, p. 6, in Rubén Darío, *Crónicas desconocidas, 1906–1914*, ed. Günther Schmigalle, Managua: Academia Nicaragüense de la Lengua, 2011, pp. 82–83. “A su padre, el profesor Cousin, se debe mucho del progreso artístico de mi país natal.”





FIGURE 1. Zelaya Cousin Family, early 1900s. Source: Instituto de Historia de Nicaragua y Centroamérica.

With this brief, passing mention, Darío only hinted at the extent to which Alejandro Cousin (b. Belgium, ca. 1835–d. Cherbourg, France, September 2, 1910),<sup>5</sup> Belgian composer, conductor, and instrumentalist, had contributed to the cultural development of Nicaragua during the second half of the nineteenth century. What follows is a biography of Cousin that traces his personal and professional path in Latin America. I present it in the form of an obituary, suggesting homage as much as incompleteness begat by significant archival lacunae, that seeks to shed light on a little-known Belgian musician from the nineteenth century. My hope is to show that European immigrant musicians were protagonists in fomenting

<sup>5</sup> The registry of birth for Cousin is not extant. However, a manifest of a ship traveling from British Honduras (today, Belize) to New Orleans, on February 14, 1868, listed an “A. Cousin... Belgian” as 33 years of age; see “A. Cousin,” *New Orleans, Passenger Lists, 1813–1963*, Ancestry.com, accessed May 23, 2018, [database access limited to subscription]. The date of death was announced in the Salvadoran newspaper *Diario del Salvador*, which cited the French periodical *Le Matin* (Paris); see “El ex Presidente Zelaya en Bruselas. La muerte de su suegro frente a las costas de Francia,” *Diario del Salvador* (San Salvador), Oct. 3, 1910.

musical culture and education in Central America, not infrequently taking a role in more than one of its countries. They contributed to state-generated projects across the region, and fulfilled local cosmopolitan desires that drew from European music and theater.

## A Belgian Musician Dies

On September 2, 1910, while on a transatlantic passenger vessel nearing Cherbourg, France, Alejandro Cousin passed away at approximately 75 years of age. At the time of death he was accompanied by his daughter, Blanca Cousin de Zelaya, and grandchildren (Figure 1).<sup>6</sup> José Santos Zelaya, recently deposed President of Nicaragua, awaited them at Cherbourg, and expected to take family to Brussels. In lieu of transporting the deceased to the Belgian capital, he was buried at Cherbourg.<sup>7</sup> Cousin was preceded in death by his wife, Léonie Oudart de Cousin, who is laid to rest in Managua.<sup>8</sup>

Cousin (Alexandre Joseph Theodore Cousin) was born in Belgium, possibly from Namur.<sup>9</sup> He may have been the son of or related to Alexandre Cousin (1801–1861), former Director of Music of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of the Belgian Infantry.<sup>10</sup> Documentation of the early years of his life is unknown, particularly his musical education. Yet his professional activity in Latin America points to a substantial background in music,<sup>11</sup> as

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<sup>6</sup> All of the Zelaya Cousin children traveled with their mother and grandfather: Berta, Isabel, Leonor, Emelina, Santos, and Anita. They remained in Nicaragua after José Santos Zelaya left the country in late 1909; see “Desde la Havana. Entrevista con el ex-presidente Zelaya...,” *Diario del Salvador* (San Salvador), Mar. 8, 1910; and “Nicaragua. Don Alejandro Cousin solicitó...,” *Diario del Salvador* (San Salvador), Aug. 10, 1910.

<sup>7</sup> “El ex Presidente Zelaya en Bruselas. La muerte de su suegro frente a las costas de Francia,” *Diario del Salvador* (San Salvador), Oct. 3, 1910. An alternate account of Cousin’s death is evidenced in the ship manifest of the *Tagus*, dated September 5, 1910. On a voyage from New York to Southampton, England, “Alejandro Cousin, male, 80 [years old], musician, Belgian” passed away as a result of “senile decay, gastritis, cardiac syncope, [and] malaria.” Apparently, he had been traveling alone as none of his family members are accounted for in the manifest; “Alejandro Cousin” Sep. 5, 1910, in *UK and Ireland, Incoming Passenger Lists, 1878–1960*, Ancestry.com, accessed Mar. 6, 2020, [database access limited to subscription].

<sup>8</sup> I have confirmed that Léonie Oudart de Cousin is buried in Cementerio San Pedro, a historic burial ground for foreigners in Managua; see Figure 4.

<sup>9</sup> “Blanche Marie Therese Alexandra Cousin” Oct. 16, 1875, in *Belgium, Births and Baptisms, 1560–1890*, FamilySearch.com, accessed December 21, 2012, [database access limited to subscription].

<sup>10</sup> Gregoir Édouard Georges Jacques, *Les artistes-musiciens belges au XVIII<sup>me</sup> et au XIX<sup>me</sup> siècle*, Bruxelles: Schott Frères, 1885, p. 14. This is a supposition of mine.

<sup>11</sup> On a “List of Aliens” contained in a manifest of a ship traveling from Ostend, Belgium to London, England on May 11, 1858, Cousin declared his profession to be that of “music teacher,” in *England, Alien Arrivals, 1810–1811, 1826–1869*, Ancestry.com, accessed May 23, 2018, [database access limited to subscription].



well as training in civil engineering.<sup>12</sup> As a piano accompanist, he arrived in Panama in June of 1858 on a tour with “M.C. Tolly, violinist, from the Paris Conservatoire, with his wife, prima donna of the Paris Opera.”<sup>13</sup> They gave performances in Panama City and Aspinwall (Colón) before traveling to Lima, Peru, where Cousin briefly resided as a private teacher of voice and piano.<sup>14</sup> He returned to Aspinwall not long thereafter and similarly worked as a teacher of “singing, the piano, and other instruments,” in addition to advertising his services as a piano tuner and technician.<sup>15</sup> At Aspinwall he collaborated as piano accompanist in a public performance with prima donna Sophie Amic Gazan and her sister, Emilia Kammerer, in a program of opera arias and duets (Figure 2).<sup>16</sup> The concert also featured Cousin as piano soloist in the waltz *Las perlas de oro* (*Pearls of Gold*), a composition of his, and in a demonstration of the “saxophorno,” perhaps one of the earliest appearances in Latin America of the musical invention by Adolphe Sax (1814–1894). He interpreted opera arias by Rossini and Donizetti, in arrangement

<sup>12</sup> It is unclear as to when he received training as a civil engineer, perhaps during the period in which he returned to Belgium (ca. 1872–ca. 1882). Nevertheless, beginning in 1889, he took part in a Commission of Isthmus Studies to determine the viability of an inter-oceanic canal through Panama, and was listed as having such expertise; see “The Canal Commission to make a Fair Report,” *Panama Star and Herald* (Panama City), Nov. 18, 1889; “El canal de Panamá,” *El Siglo Diez y Nueve*, Mexico City, Nov. 27, 1889; “La venida del a Comisión de Estudios al Istmo...”, *Estrella de Panama*, Panama City, Jan. 18, 1890; and “Le Canal”, *Panama Star and Herald*, Panama City, Mar. 19, 1894.

<sup>13</sup> “We learn that a troupe of French Artistes...”, *Panama Star and Herald*, Panama City, Jun. 12, 1858. Tolly and his wife continued to tour Latin America the following year, collaborating with an ensemble in Guatemala City on at least one occasion; see Rafael Vásquez A., *Historia de la música en Guatemala*, Guatemala: Tipografía Nacional, 1950, p. 314.

<sup>14</sup> “A. Cousin, Profesor de canto y piano...”, *El Comercio*, Lima, Peru, Sep. 17, 1858.

<sup>15</sup> Alejandro, Cousin, “To the Public”, *Panama Star and Herald*, Panama City, Dec. 23, 1858.

<sup>16</sup> “Salón del Cabildo, Gran concierto vocal e instrumental”, *Panama Star and Herald*, Panama City, Dec. 11, 1858. Sophie Amic Gazan (born Kammerer) met an untimely death not long after her collaboration with Cousin, while traveling by steamship from Panama to San Francisco in late December of 1858. She and Emilia were the daughters of Jakob Friedrich Kammerer (1796–1857), German inventor of the phosphorous matchstick. Twenty-four years old at the time of death, Sophie was married to Theodore Amic Gazan de la Perriere, a professional musician and photographer. According to historians Peter Palmquist and Thomas Kailbourn, he and “Joseph Mazzuchelli (*Amic Gazan and Mazzuchelli*) were the earliest known artists to take photographs on paper on the Pacific coast of North America.” As well, he was a former French soldier once employed in a similar capacity by the Mexican government. “Died. On board the Golden Age...”, *Daily Alta California*, Dec. 29, 1858; “We learn with regret that Madam Sophia Amic-Gazan...”, *Panama Star and Herald* (Panama City), Jan. 20, 1859; Otto Krätz, “Kammerer, Jakob Friedrich,” in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 11 (1977), accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd137711999.html#ndbcontent>; Peter E. Palmquist and Thomas R. Kailbourn, *Pioneer Photographers of the Far West: A Biographical Dictionary, 1840–1865*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 82; “French Expedition to Mexico”, *Daily Alta California*, Dec. 12, 1859.

**SALÓN DEL CABILDO.**  
**Gran concierto vocal e instrumental**  
*para el domingo, 12 de Diciembre*  
**ofrecido por la célebre Cantatriz**  
**SOFIA AMIC-GAZAN,**  
*prima donna absoluta del teatro Superior*  
*de VIENA cct. y alumna del conservatorio*  
*de Milan con el concurso de la Stai*  
**EMILIA KAMMERER**  
hermana de la Sra. Amic-Gazan y el pro-  
fesor Sr.  
**A. COUSIN.**  
**1.ª PARTE.**  
1.ª **LA FAVORITA** (Donizetti) o más fernand-  
Cantada por la Sra. Emilia Kammerer, con acompa-  
ñamiento de piano, por el Sr. Cousin.  
2.ª **ADANTE Y RONDO** escrito por Berriot para  
la célebre *Malibran*, y cantado por la Sra. S. Amic-  
Gazan con acompañamiento de piano.  
3.ª **Y. LOMBAEDI**-Aria de la ópera de Verdi,  
tocado por el Sr. A. Cousin, en el Saxophorno, con  
acompañamiento de piano por la Sra. Emilia.  
4.ª **LA SEMIRAMIS**- Gran Duo de la Sublime  
ópera de Rossini, cantado por la Sra. Amic-Gazan  
y su hermana.  
5.ª **LAS PERLAS DE ORO**- Vals compuesto y  
ejecutado en el piano por el Sr. Cousin.  
6.ª **LA SOLEA**- Linda canción española, com-  
puesta para la Sra. Amic-Gazan y cantada por ella.  
**2.ª PARTE.**  
1.ª **GRAN AUDETE**, música del mismo Rossi-  
ni, y cantado por la Sra. Emilia.  
2.ª **HERNANI**- Cavatina de la hermosa ópera de  
Verdi, cantada por la Sra. Amic-Gazan con acompa-  
ñamiento de piano.  
3.ª **TORQUATO TASSO**-Aria de la ópera de  
Donizetti, tocado por el profesor Sr. Cousin en el Sa-  
xophorno, acompañamiento de piano.  
4.ª **LA COLASA**- Chistosa canción andaluza  
cantada por la Sra. Emilia.  
5.ª **BOLERO DE LAS VISPERAS SICILIA-  
NAS**, de la ópera de Verdi cantado por la Sra. Amic-  
Gazan.  
6.ª **LA FLOR DE LA CANELA**- Canción espa-  
ñola arreglada expresamente por el maestro Mulder  
para la Sra. Amic-Gazan y cantada por ella.  
Precio del boleto 2 pesos fuertes. Empezará las 8  
en punto.  
**NOTA.**- Se tomarán los boletos de Concieto en el  
Hotel Aspinwall, en el San Nicolás, en el Comercial  
Restaurant, y en el Hotel de la Municipalidad la noche  
del Concierto.  
**OTRA.**- Se suplica a las familias que quieran hon-  
rarnos con su asistencia tengan labondad de llevar sus  
álbums el domingo por la mañana como es costumbre  
hacerlo.

FIGURE 2. Concert Program, Salón del  
Cabildo, Aspinwall (Colón), Panamá,  
December 12, 1858.  
Source: *Panama Star and Herald*.

for the saxophone, with Kammerer accompanying at the piano. A positive review of the concert noted, “Sr. Cousin also added much to the entertainment of the evening by his masterly performance on the Saxophorno, and the pretty waltz....”<sup>17</sup> These accounts are a testament to the professional abilities and musical experience he initially brought to the American continent, which contributed to his later successes in Central America.

<sup>17</sup> “Madam Amic-Gazan’s Concert”, *Panama Star and Herald*, Panama City, Dec. 14, 1858. Cousin may have known Adolphe Sax personally.



FIGURE 3. Banda de los Supremos Poderes, Managua, Nicaragua, 1890s. The bearded man at center may be Alejandro Cousin. Source: *Guía ilustrada de Nicaragua*.

By the end of June of 1859, Cousin had secured the directorship of the Banda de los Supremos Poderes in El Salvador. On at least one occasion, his work with the band attracted a positive review: “Mr. Cousin and the young musicians, who deserved the most complete approval from people of good taste who heard them, left nothing to be desired. It was noted, above all, how much the musicians have advanced in the style of military music, under the direction of Mr. Cousin.”<sup>18</sup> His fortunes later took a turn for the worse when war

<sup>18</sup> “Crónica Local. Gran retreta de gala”, *Gaceta Oficial*, El Salvador, Jun. 1, 1859, p. 3. “Nada dejaron que desear el Señor Cousin y los jóvenes ejecutores, quienes merecieron la más completa aprobación de las personas de buen gusto que les oyeron; notándose sobre todo lo mucho que los individuos de la música marcial han adelantado en estilo, bajo la enseñanza de Mr. Cousin.” The official chronicle printed the concert program, yet omitted the composers. However, two works can be deduced as arrangements from *opéras comiques* by French composer Daniel F.-E. Auber (1782–1871): the overture *Le domino noir* (The Black Domino, 1837), and a “grand potpourri on the most beautiful themes” from *La part du diable* (The Devil’s Share, 1843). “Gran pot-pourri sobre los más bonitos motivos...”

broke out during the Liberal administration of president Gerardo Barrios (1813–1865).<sup>19</sup> On October 26, 1863, alongside a number of foreign officers who worked for the government, Cousin was arrested and nearly executed by an occupying military force, following the departure of Barrios from the capital.<sup>20</sup> His most enduring musical composition written while in El Salvador was the military march *Gerardo Barrios* (paso doble), which functioned in a ceremonial capacity as a patriotic or national music.<sup>21</sup>

From the end of the 1860s until his death, Cousin resided primarily in Nicaragua, while spending about a decade in other places (from the early 1870s onward). In 1868, the administration of president Fernando Guzmán Solórzano (1867–1871) hired him to be the founding director of the Banda de los Supremos Poderes,<sup>22</sup> a military institution with a ceremonial and educational function, based in Managua (Figures 3 and 4).<sup>23</sup> Once established in the capital, Cousin also worked as an entrepreneur. He and French engineer Paul Lévy later received government concessions to pursue business projects.<sup>24</sup> Cousin left Nicaragua for about ten years, for reasons that remain unclear, and spent them in El Salvador and Belgium. In the former, he was appointed “special commissioner” to represent the Salvadoran government in assisting Honduran internal affairs, resulting in the

<sup>19</sup> Pedro Zamora Castellanos, *Vida militar en Centro América*, Guatemala: Tipografía Nacional, 1924, p. 403.

<sup>20</sup> “Central America. Arrival of the Salvador. Twenty Eight Days of Siege of San Salvador”, *Panama Star and Herald*, Panama City, Nov. 17, 1863. Barrios would be executed two years later; see “Central America. Salvador,” *Panama Mercantile Chronicle*, Panama City, Sep. 17, 1865.

<sup>21</sup> The march/paso doble was recorded by Victor in 1926; see “Gerardo Barrios”, Victor matrix BVE-35691, *Discography of American Historical Recordings*, accessed May 23, 2018, [http://victor.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/matrix/detail/800009931/BVE-35691-Gerardo\\_Barrios](http://victor.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/matrix/detail/800009931/BVE-35691-Gerardo_Barrios).

<sup>22</sup> “A Granel. El señor don Alejandro Cousin...”, *Diario del Salvador*, San Salvador, Sep. 30, 1910. Nicaraguan Secretary of State Tomás Ayón hired Cousin to direct the band. On at least one occasion, Cousin acted as Ayón’s courier, delivering an important diplomatic message to a representative of the United States; see Tomás Ayón, and Alfonso Ayón. *Escritos varios de los doctores Tomás y Alfonso Ayón*, ed. J. Andrés Urtecho, Managua: Tipografía Nacional, 1914, pp. 327 and 332.

<sup>23</sup> “Noticiero Centroamericano. Nicaragua. Managua, 12 mayo”, *Diario del Salvador*, San Salvador, May 14, 1910; “Constancias-certificaciones, suscritas por A. Cousin, Director de la Banda S. S. P. P., Oct–Nov 1892”, IHNCA, RS – Sección 2 / RS – 0069 (Managua). His appointment can be deduced, as can some of the later dates of his years in Nicaragua, from a particular letter of recommendation for musician Miguel Castillo, of whom Cousin had known since 1868. Furthermore, in his *Notas geográficas y económicas sobre la República de Nicaragua* (1873), Paul Lévy claimed that Cousin had founded the Banda de los Supremos Poderes. Nicaraguan composer Luis A. Delgadillo later echoes this point, referring to the ensemble as a “banda presidencial” (“presidential band”), while noting it to have been dissolved at the end of the 1920s; Luis A. Delgadillo, “La música indígena y colonial en Nicaragua”, *Revista de estudios musicales* 1/3 (1950), p. 55.

<sup>24</sup> “Decreto de 14 de marzo...”, *Colección de decretos legislativos*, Ministerio de Fomento, Nicaragua, 1870, pp. 159–160. Cousin and Lévy were given concession to build public water fountains in various municipalities.





FIGURE 4. Banda de los Supremos Poderes, Managua, Nicaragua, early 1900s. Source: B. Gordillo.

Leiva-Cousin Agreement of 1873.<sup>25</sup> During his time in El Salvador, Cousin also founded a *Sociedad Filarmónica* (Philharmonic Society) in the capital.<sup>26</sup> He then returned to Belgium and married Leonie Isidore Josephe Oudart (d. 1893). They had two children, the aforementioned Blanca and a son, Luis Alejandro (ca. 1881–1935), who later held the position of Minister of War under Zelaya.<sup>27</sup> In mid-July of 1882 Cousin resided, once again, in Nicaragua, where he resumed the direction of the Banda de los Supremos Poderes.<sup>28</sup> Among the official obligations of the ensemble were to give concerts, known as *retretas* (tattoos), twice a week at *Parque Central* in Managua. The programs were published in advance, and reflected the musical tastes of the day—popular dances, military marches, and opera arrangements, as well as compositions by the director.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, he sold and rented pianos in the capital, and offered a selection of sheet music for piano and other instruments.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, toward the end of the 1880s, he received a government concession to establish beer breweries,<sup>31</sup> and much later, a matchstick factory.<sup>32</sup>

A proponent of music education, Cousin advocated not just for the musicians under his direction, but for its inclusion in the public education system. In early December of 1888, he published an essay in the Managua newspaper *El País* that beseeched the government to incorporate music education into the national curriculum.

<sup>25</sup> The agreement was signed by Cousin and Honduran president Ponciano Leiva on July 18, 1873; “Comunicados. Convenio Leiva-Cousin” *El Porvenir*, Managua, Oct. 25, 1874; and José Ángel Zúñiga Huete, *Presidentes de Honduras*, Mexico: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 2 (1988), p. 15.

<sup>26</sup> Rafael González Sol, *Datos históricos sobre el arte de la música en El Salvador*, San Salvador: Imprenta Mercurio, 1940, p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> “Blanche Marie Therese Alexandra Cousin”, Oct. 16, 1875, in *Belgium, Births and Baptisms, 1560–1890*, FamilySearch.com, accessed December 21, 2012, [database access limited to subscription].

<sup>28</sup> “Retreta”, *El Ferrocarril*, Managua, Jul. 22, 1882. A passing mention of Cousin noted that his recent taking charge of the band, suggesting a return to Nicaragua, had produced excellent results for the band.

<sup>29</sup> For a representative sample of published programs, see “Retreta de Esta Noche”, *El País* (Managua), Dec. 4–29, 1887; and “Retreta de hoy”, *Diario de la Capital* (Managua), Apr. 5–Aug. 30, 1891.

<sup>30</sup> Alejandro Cousin, “Avisos. Música”, *El País* (Managua), Apr. 4, 1888. He also sold strings and replacement parts, and offered cornets, flutes, violins, and other instruments.

<sup>31</sup> “Otro idem de 22 de marzo, a favor de don A. Cousin”, *Colección de decretos legislativos* (Managua: 1887), 70–71. Cousin received an exclusive, five-year concession from the government to establish breweries in the departments of Managua, Masaya, and Granada.

<sup>32</sup> In March of 1903, the Zelaya government (specifically, the Ministerio de Fomento) granted Cousin a twenty-five year concession to manufacture and sell matchsticks throughout Nicaragua; see “Sección Oficial. Poder Legislativo. El Gobierno de Nicaragua concede al señor Alejandro Cousin...”, *La Gaceta* No. 1896, Nicaragua, March 10, 1903.

The first paragraphs of the essay exhibited a nuanced argument, revealing a certain depth of argument and character of thought:

It is an apparent fact that, after a few years here, the government of this Republic has made an effort at expanding public education, reducing illiteracy in the most remote villages, and preparing a new generation that would compare favorably with many cultivated countries in Latin America.

For this, one factor is necessary—peace—a requirement alongside the integrity of a government which has ruled up to this point, and with the hope that the future may see a continuance, which would undoubtedly advance education towards greater strides, and as a consequence, the progress of the agriculture industry, the only future wealth that the generous soil of this beautiful country bestows upon us.

I repeat, the government has done much for education, but I dare say it isn't everything they could have done. It might be due to omission or lack of initiative, yet one thing is certain, there's an absence of music education in our cities. Music, which is heard in all programs on the smallest stages in other countries; music, which has raised the stature of some nations, more than their literature; music, which strengthens familial ties and relieves the soul diminished by work; music, nearly the only diversion during long tropical nights; music, a necessary adornment of youth, etc.

As a country progresses, one necessity brings about another. Nicaragua's advancement arrived a few years ago to the point at which music education can now be introduced.<sup>33</sup>

Cousin left the directorship of the Banda de los Supremos Poderes at the beginning of the 1890s, as his social status rose with the marriage of his daughter to prominent Liberal figure José Santos Zelaya.<sup>34</sup> Not long thereafter, Zelaya staged a coup d'état and initiated

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<sup>33</sup> Alejandro Cousin, "Instrucción Musical", *El País*, Managua, Jan. 19, 1888. "Es un hecho muy palpable que desde algunos años acá, los Gobiernos de esta República se han esforzado por ensanchar la instrucción pública, sacando así de la ignorancia hasta los pueblos más insignificantes y preparando a una nueva generación que en nada cederá a los pueblos más cultos de América. / Para esto se necesita de una importante cosa que es la paz. Esta condición agregada a la honradez de los Gobiernos que han regido hasta la vez, y con la esperanza de que los futuros sigan observando la misma conducta, sin duda hará marchar la instrucción a grandes pasos, y como consecuencia, el progreso de la agricultura, que es el único porvenir de riqueza que nos brinda el suelo generoso de este bello país. / Si, lo repito, los Gobiernos han hecho muchísimo por la instrucción, y sin embargo me atrevo a decir que no es todo lo que hubieran debido hacer. Sea por olvido o por carencia de iniciativa, lo cierto es que algo falta en la instrucción de nuestros pueblos, y es la música. La música, que figura en todos los programas de las más humildes escenas de otros países; la música, que ha elevado muy alto el nombre de algunos pueblos, más que su literatura. La música, que estrecha los lazos de la familia, que solaza el espíritu abatido por el trabajo; la música, casi el único recreo de las largas noches de los trópicos, el adorno necesario de la juventud, etc. etc. / A medida que un país va progresando, una necesidad trae consigo otra: así es que, el progreso de Nicaragua ha llegado hace algunos años, a tal altura que puede introducirse en ella la instrucción musical."

<sup>34</sup> According to the official registry of her marriage to Zelaya, Blanca had lived in Managua for "more than seven years." She married Zelaya on May 12, 1892; "José Santos Zelaya", *Nicaragua*,





FIGURE 5. Tomb of Léonie Oudart de Cousin, 2013, Cementerio San Pedro, Managua, Nicaragua. Source: B. Gordillo.

a sixteen-year dictatorship of Nicaragua.<sup>35</sup> This was to take a bittersweet turn for Cousin when his wife Léonie Oudart passed away in June of 1893 (Figure 5). Cousin also held other government positions during the Zelaya administration. Late in life he was appointed Consul General of Nicaragua in Brussels, Belgium.<sup>36</sup>

Cousin's musical output, given that much of it remains lost, comprises a couple of known compositions—the march *Roberto Sacasa*<sup>37</sup> and national anthem *Hermosa soberana*<sup>38</sup> (Figure 6)—that served as official music under different Nicaraguan presidential administrations, those of Roberto Sacasa and José Santos Zelaya, respectively. Modeled after the

*Civil Registration, 1809–2011*, Ancestry.com, accessed March 4, 2020, [database access limited to subscription]. Zelaya fell from power in 1909 as a result of U.S. intervention.

<sup>35</sup> Jorge Eduardo Arellano, *La pax americana en Nicaragua (1910–1932)*, Managua: Fondo Editorial CIRA, 2004, pp. 84–89.

<sup>36</sup> “Bulletin officiel”, *La Revue diplomatique: politique, littérature, finances, commerce international*, Aug. 1909, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Alejandro Cousin, “Nicaragua. Robert Sacasa. Patriotic Air”, in John Philip Sousa, *National, Patriotic, and Typical Airs of All Lands*, Philadelphia: H. Coleman, 1890, p. 173.

<sup>38</sup> Alejandro Cousin, *Himno de Nicaragua*, Managua: Tipografía Nacional, 1905. After the fall of Zelaya, *Hermosa soberana* became the official anthem of the Liberal Party in Nicaragua, a status it continues to hold at present. Its association with Zelaya would be thus inextricable, leading Luis A. Delgadillo to refer to it as a “presidential march”; see Luis A. Delgadillo, “Por nuestro himno nacional”, *La Prensa*, Managua, Mar. 12, 1939. “...marcha presidencial...”

bellicose French anthem *La marseillaise*, the unattributed text of *Hermosa Soberana* evokes an exoticist maternal image of the Nicaraguan sovereign<sup>39</sup>:

<i>Original</i>	<i>English translation</i>
Hermosa soberana Cual sultana, Nicaragua De sus lagos al rumor Ven en sus hijos denodados Los soldados del honor Siempre libre y hechicera Su bandera ve flotar	Beautiful, sovereign, That sultaness, Nicaragua, From whose lakes, it is said, Sees in her valiant sons, Soldiers of honor, Always free and enchanting, Her standard flies.
Apacible se reclina Cual ondina de la mar, Orgullosa cual deidad, Muestra altiva y noble el pecho En defensa del derecho Y su santa libertad	She reclines peacefully, Like a sea nymph, Proud deity, Exhibits an elevated and a noble bosom In defense of justice And her sacred liberty.

Although few in extant number, a handful of programs of the Banda de los Supremos Poderes included works by Cousin. Published in local Managua newspapers, they consist of the polka-mazurka *Leonie*,<sup>40</sup> paso doble *Del Atlántico al Pacífico*,<sup>41</sup> and *Los Ecos del Salvador*.<sup>42</sup> It is worth noting that the aforementioned march/paso doble *Gerardo Barrios*<sup>43</sup> may be the only work still performed in Latin America.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *Recordatorio patriótico: obsequio del Señor Presidente de la República, Doctor Don Alfonso Quiñones Molina, a las escuelas de El Salvador*, San Salvador: Imprenta Nacional, 1923, p. 94.

<sup>40</sup> “Retreta de esta noche”, *El País*, Managua, Dec. 11, 1887.

<sup>41</sup> “Retreta de hoy”, *Diario de la Capital*, Managua, Jun. 14, 1891. The work was dedicated to Aniceto G. Menocal, a Cuban engineer employed by the United States government to oversee the construction of an inter-oceanic canal across Nicaragua.

<sup>42</sup> “Retreta de hoy”, *Diario de la Capital*, Managua, May 31, 1891; and “Programa del concierto de hoy”, *La Noticia*, Managua, May 15, 1917.

<sup>43</sup> A number of videos on YouTube attest to the work having been recorded in the recent past, and in ceremonial use by the Salvadorean military.

<sup>44</sup> The Bibliothèque nationale de France holds a number of works by an “A. Cousin,” which may have been written by the Belgian composer in question. They include *Narcisse et ses deux soeurs* (“comical song-march,” 1911) for voice and piano, and eleven works for solo piano, all dated 1909—*Baliverne-polka*, *Balladeuse* (polka), *Fructidor* (schottisch), *Les glycines* (mazurka), *Les Libellules* (valse), *Les yeux doux* (valse), *Marche des bretteurs*, *Polka des bons diables*, *Robinsonette* (marche), *Thilda* (mazurka), and *Trianon-schottisch*.

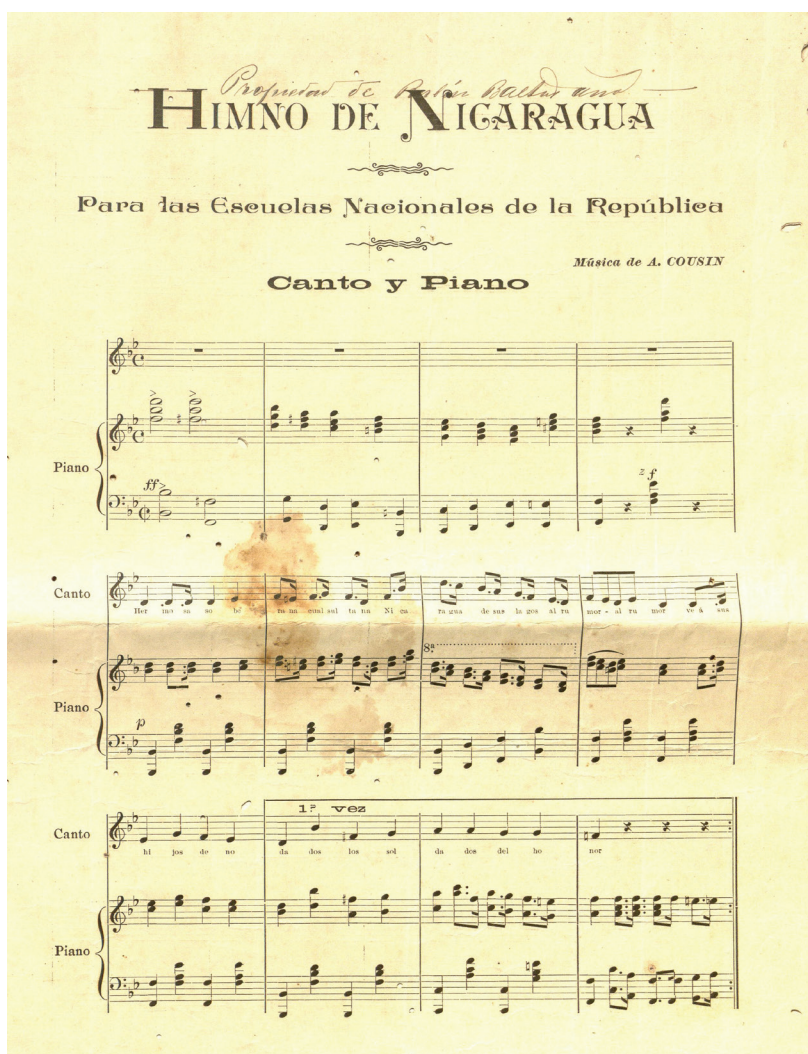


FIGURE 6. Alejandro Cousin, *Himno de Nicaragua*, 1905.<sup>45</sup>

Source: Instituto de Historia de Nicaragua y Centroamérica.

<sup>45</sup> Alejandro Cousin, *Himno de Nicaragua*, Managua: Tipografía Nacional, 1905, p. 1. The work was recorded by Victor in 1929; see “Hermosa soberana”, Victor matrix BVE-57585, *Discography of American Historical Recordings*, accessed March 9, 2020, [https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/matrix/detail/800028468/BVE-57585-Hermosa soberana](https://adp.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/matrix/detail/800028468/BVE-57585-Hermosa%20soberana). An extant copy of the Victor recording is found in the Arhoolie Foundation’s Strachwitz Frontera Collection of Mexican and Mexican American Recordings, accessed March 9, 2020, <http://frontera.library.ucla.edu/recordings/hermosa-soberana-0>. The foundation has digitized the recording and made it accessible online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gJvSDpqhcg>.



Aside from his compositions, Cousin left a legacy noteworthy for his influence on musicians with whom he worked while director of the Banda de los Supremos Poderes, in both El Salvador and Nicaragua. This also touched members of his own family. A prominent musical heir was a step-grandson, and child of President Zelaya and Brígida Pérez<sup>46</sup>: Carlos Alfonso Zelaya Pérez (b. 1893), a promising vaudeville and concert pianist.<sup>47</sup> In late June of 1910, following a period spent outside of the country, Cousin returned to Managua where friends, colleagues, and musicians formerly under his charge celebrated their “unforgettable maestro.”<sup>48</sup> Showered with praise and gifts at an event held in his honor, the Banda de los Supremos Poderes performed a number of musical selections. The event turned out to be a final tribute to Cousin and his accomplishments in Nicaragua.

## Epilogue

In his homage to the “thirty years” of Conservative administrations (1858-1893), writer Anselmo Flete Bolaños highlighted Cousin in explaining the economic policies of president Vicente Quadra (1871-1875), who took a reactionary approach in his oversight of the national purse, which earned him a reputation as a miser.<sup>49</sup> Entitled “La banda” (“The Band”), the chapter recalled the seemingly arbitrary manner in which Quadra, on one occasion, adjusted the salaries of the members of the Banda de los Supremos Poderes. Set as an exchange between Quadra and an employee of the Treasury, the story painted descriptions of each musician, noting their instruments and salaries, which were summarily adjusted depending on the size of instrument, regardless of military rank or seniority. When Quadra asked after Cousin, whom he referred to as the man with the “palito” (“little stick” = baton), the president was wholly indifferent to learn of his reputation as a “great

<sup>46</sup> “The Final Curtain. Zelaya—Señora Brígida Pérez...,” *The Billboard*, November 13, 1948, 57.

<sup>47</sup> Luis A. Delgadillo, “A Manera de Suite... II. Cuánto vale la genialidad!”, *La Noticia*, Managua, Sep. 29, 1956. Carlos Alfonso Zelaya led a successful career in vaudeville, and as a Hollywood film actor, under the stage name “Don Zelaya”. Luis A. Delgadillo affectionately referred to him as the “Liszt salvaje” of Nicaragua (“Savage Liszt” of Nicaragua). As well, Delgadillo considered him a “good friend and compatriot”; see Luis A. Delgadillo, “A Manera de Suite... II. Don Zelaya en yanquilandia”, *La Prensa*, Managua, Jun. 30, 1940.

<sup>48</sup> A local newspaper noted three members of the band: Víctor Manuel Zúniga conducted the program, Gilberto Bermúdez presented the honoree with a gold medal, and Nicolás Arróliga spoke on the band’s behalf. “Por un maestro,” *El Comercio* (Managua), Jun. 28, 1910. “...maestro inolvidable.”

<sup>49</sup> Anselmo Flete Bolaños, *Recuerdos de los treinta años* (Managua: Tipografía Nacional, 1914), 21-26. For a study on the “Thirty Years” of conservative rule in Nicaragua, see Arturo Cruz, Jr., *Nicaragua’s Conservative Republic, 1858-93* (New York: Palgrave, 2002). For a study on Vicente Quadra, see Jorge Eduardo Arellano, *Don Vicente Quadra: lección histórica de gobernante ejemplar* (Managua: Academia de Geografía e Historia de Nicaragua, 2008).

European musician.”<sup>50</sup> He was also taken aback by Cousin’s sizeable salary, especially when told it was insufficient for a person of his distinction. “And it is still meagre!” Quadra mocked, “And the man does no more than draw lines in the air with his little stick!”<sup>51</sup> Although the employee tried to defend Cousin, the president was unable to appreciate the importance of the directorship of the band, and chose to eliminate his position altogether then and there. At the expense of Cousin and members of the band, this anecdote served to recall the austerity measures taken by Quadra that bordered on tragicomedy. Yet it also marked the high esteem Cousin enjoyed during his early years in Nicaragua, and of the memory he left upon death.

European musicians not unlike Cousin played important roles in Central America during the latter half of the nineteenth century, often serving to enrich local culture while helping to build musical organizations and institutions. Indeed, these musicians were to be found in every nation-state of the region: German composer Emil Dressner (fl. 1870–1885) in El Salvador and Guatemala<sup>52</sup>; Italian conductor and composer Juan Aberle Sforza (1846–1930) in Guatemala and El Salvador<sup>53</sup>; German conductor Gustavo Stamm (fl. 1880s) in Honduras<sup>54</sup>; and Belgian conductor Jean Loots (1872–1929)<sup>55</sup> and Spanish music educator José Campabadal Calvet (1849–1905)<sup>56</sup> in Costa Rica. As Rubén Darío observed in *La Nación*, Alejandro Cousin had been a notable protagonist in the artistic development of Nicaragua. Indeed, he left an indelible mark on Nicaraguan musical culture, and built a foundation for generations of native musicians who would remember him fondly well into the twentieth century.

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<sup>50</sup> Flete Bolaños, *Recuerdos*, 25. “...un gran artista europeo.”

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 26. “Y aún es poco! Y el hombre no hace más que rayas en el aire con su palito!”

<sup>52</sup> Dieter Lehnhoff, *Creación musical en Guatemala* (Guatemala: Universidad Rafael Landívar, 2005), 214; Carlos Urrutia Flemenco, *La ciudad de San Salvador, capital de la República de El Salvador* (San Salvador: Imprenta Nacional, 1924), 162; and Zamora Castellanos, *Vida militar*, 481.

<sup>53</sup> Alfred E. Lemmon, “Juan Aberle,” *Grove Music Online*, 2001, accessed February 25, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.45842>; and “Juan Aberle Sforza,” <http://archivomusical.ucr.ac.cr/catalogo/autores/juan-aberle-sforza>.

<sup>54</sup> T.M. Scruggs, “Honduras,” *Grove Music Online*, 2001, accessed February 25, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.13297>.

<sup>55</sup> Bernal Flores Zeller, “Republic of Costa Rica,” *Grove Music Online*, 2001, accessed February 25, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.41086>.

<sup>56</sup> “José Campabadal Calvet” <http://archivomusical.ucr.ac.cr/catalogo/autores/jose-campabadal-calvet>.