

Cantores y ministriles

Music in Seville in the Golden Age

Our program offers a panoramic view of Spanish music from the mid-fifteenth century up through the first decade of the seventeenth, loosely centered on the Andalusian capital, Seville, and its cathedral, Santa Maria de la Sede. The city, founded by the Romans as Hispalis, was known as Ishbiliya during five centuries of Muslim rule from 742 until Christian *reconquista* in 1248. In 1401 the members of the cathedral chapter decided to construct a new church on the former site of the city's principal mosque, resolving, according to local tradition, to "build a church so beautiful and so grand that those who see it finished will consider us madmen." Completed one hundred years later in 1506, the cathedral is the third largest church in the world, and the largest cathedral; next to it stands an imposing bell tower, the Giralda, which incorporates the minaret of the mosque.

Seville's wealth, considerably enhanced after 1492 by its port's monopoly on trade with the Empire's overseas dominions, nurtured a Golden Age in the arts. Many of the greatest Spanish composers of the sixteenth century were associated with the city and its cathedral, including Francisco de Peñalosa (d. 1528), Cristóbal de Morales (d. 1553), Francisco Guerrero (d. 1599), and Alonso Lobo (d. 1617). Morales and Guerrero were both natives of Seville; Morales proudly styled himself "Hispalensis" on the title pages of his publications, while Guerrero spent most of his life and career at the cathedral and died in the city at the age of 71. Lobo was a choirboy at the cathedral, like Guerrero (and probably Morales), and eventually followed in his footsteps as its *maestro de capilla*.

A notable feature of the cathedral's music was its ensemble of *menestriles altos*, players of "loud" wind instruments such as shawms and sackbuts, which was established by the chapter in 1526—one of the first wind bands on staff at an ecclesiastical institution.

Lunes 9 de julio de 1526

...como sera muy honrosa en esta santa iglesia y en alavança del culto divino tener salarizados e por suyos algunos menestriles altos sacabuches e chirimias para que

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...because it would be very honorable in this holy church and to the glory of the divine service to employ and have on salary some loud minstrels, players of

tengan en algunas fiestas principales e procesiones que faze esta santa iglesia... determinaron e mandaron que se resciban çinco menestriales altos en esta santa iglesia tres chirimias que sean tiple e tenor e contra e dos sacabuches personas habiles en su arte para que sirvan en esta santa iglesia...

trombones and shawms, to be used in the most important feasts and processions celebrated by this holy church... it is determined and ordered that five loud minstrels be hired by this church: three shawms (treble, tenor, and contra) and two trombones, persons skilled in their art, to serve in this holy church...

As the century progressed, Spanish wind bands added *bajón* (bass dulcian) and cornettos to the shawms and sackbuts, and the ensemble of *menestriales* became an indispensable and characteristic part of the sound of sacred music in Spain. Guerrero carefully nurtured Seville's wind band; the cathedral archives include detailed records of his instructions as to which instruments should be played when, and which players were permitted to add *glosas* (diminutions) and in what circumstances.

Seville's *menestriales* played for processions outside the cathedral—"in order that, with greater devotion and affection, they move and incite the people to accompany them and come to divine services in the holy church," according to a capitular document from 1553—and for services inside it. They played in alternation with the singers in verse settings such as the *Salve regina* or Magnificat, probably substituted from time to time for singers within the choir, and may have doubled vocal parts on occasion. A single *bajón* was regularly used in Spanish churches to support a vocal ensemble. The band also contributed purely instrumental performances to services at moments such as the Elevation, drawing their repertoire from collections of sacred and secular vocal music transmitted without texts, like the manuscript (from the ducal church of San Pedro de Lerma) from which come the instrumental pieces added to the Magnificat in this performance. (Our thanks to Douglas Kirk for the idea of extending the Magnificat with interpolated instrumental music.)

Spain exported music and musicians to Italy—both Peñalosa and Morales sang in the papal chapel—and imported music and musicians from the Franco-Flemish north. Among the latter was Johannes Urrede, or Johannes Wreede, who left his hometown of Bruges for Spain around 1460 after being denied a position at St. Donatian because his father was already employed there. By 1476 he had joined the household of the Duke of Alba, García Álvarez de Toledo, cousin to

Ferdinand of Aragon. The duke wrote the poem *Nunca fue pena mayor*; set to exquisitely sad music by Urrede, the song achieved wide fame, inspiring masses by both Peñalosa and Pierre de la Rue. (La Rue probably encountered the piece when he visited Spain as a member of the chapel of Philip the Fair, not long after Philip, the son of the Habsburg emperor Maximilian and Mary of Burgundy, wed Juana, daughter of the Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand and Isabel.)

The first half of the program presents a very small sample of the riches of Spanish song from around the turn of the century, drawing from two famous songbooks. The Cancionero de Palacio (once held at the Biblioteca de Palacio in Madrid) was copied for the royal court of Ferdinand of Aragon beginning around 1505, with various later additions. Pride of place among the nearly 550 songs is given to Urrede's *Nunca fue pena mayor*, which opens the collection. The Cancionero de Palacio also contains music by Peñalosa (including *Por las sierras de Madrid*, which combines several pre-existing tunes and texts into a contrapuntal *ensalada*), Johannes Cornago, and Francisco de la Torre. Cornago earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Paris in 1449 and was thus probably born in the 1420s, around the same time as the more famous Franco-Flemish composer Johannes Ockeghem, who was sent to Spain in 1470 on a diplomatic mission from the king of France. Ockeghem's arrangement of Cornago's superbly wrought song *Qu'es mi vida preguntays*, with two new contratenors substituted for Cornago's contra, is transmitted in another songbook, the Cancionero de la Colombina, which was copied in the 1490s, probably in Seville itself, where it was purchased by Christopher Columbus's second son, eventually ending up in the cathedral library. *Nunca fue pena mayor* is found in this songbook, too.

After receiving his degree in Paris, Cornago spent several decades at the Aragonese court in Naples, but returned to Spain by 1475 to join the court of Ferdinand of Aragon. There is no record of him after 1475. Had he lived and remained at Ferdinand's court for several years, he could have met Urrede, who was a singer and *maestro de capilla* of the Aragonese royal chapel from 1477 until the early 1480s, and de la Torre, who was employed there from 1483 until 1500. De la Torre then became a curate at Seville Cathedral; he died there in 1504. Another of our composers, Peñalosa, also served the king, from 1498 until Ferdinand's death in 1516, after which he spent four years in the papal chapel in Rome before he too moved to Seville, where he died in 1528.

The last composer on our program, Sebastián de Vivanco, *almost* took a job at the cathedral in Seville, where he would have worked alongside its celebrated *maestro de capilla*, Francisco Guerrero. Vivanco was invited to Seville by the cathedral authorities in August of 1587, and on February 29, 1588, the choirboys were entrusted to him, but after less than a month he left to resume the post of *maestro de capilla* in his home town of Ávila. The episode seems to have been a ploy on Vivanco's part to negotiate a more satisfactory contract with the cathedral in Ávila. Then as now, a successful musician had to be at least one part entrepreneur.

—Scott Metcalfe