

HOLY WEEK IN MEXICO (XVI^e-XVIII^e s.)

WORKS by L. CORONADO, A. RODRIGUEZ DE MATA, H. FRANCO & J. de LIENAS



“

From the very first measures [...] one can almost speak of a mystical experience.” Resmusica

”

INTRODUCTION

For the past decade, the ensemble Vox Cantoris has been deeply engaged in the liturgical repertoire of New Spain, particularly the music preserved in the cathedrals and women's convents between the sixteenth and the eighteenth century. This work has been grounded in several research trips to Mexico, where we established close relationships with archivists, historians, and musicologists who granted us access to exceptionally rich musical collections. From these sources, we have built an extensive documentary archive — including photographs of manuscripts and materials from cathedral and convent choirs — which has enabled us to produce transcriptions, critical editions, and recordings. Our approach is equally driven by a commitment to transmission : through workshops held in Saltillo, la escuela musical estatal de San Luis Potosí (Picture 1), and at U.N.A.M in Mexico City, we have offered young musicians the opportunity to engage directly with this remarkable and still largely unknown heritage.

JEUDI SAINT - (Feria quinta, ad matutinum)

LAMENTATIO IN COENA DOMINI – Juan de Lienas
CHRISTUSFACTUSEST, 1repartie, (PlainChant, Salamae, 1582)

VENDREDI SAINT (Feria sexta, ad matutinum)

LAMENTATIO – Antonio Rodriguez de Mata
Ad Laudes : CHRISTUS FACTUS EST, 2e partie
PASSIO SECUNDUM JOANNEM de Luis Coronado

SAMEDI SAINT (Sabbatho, ad matutinum)

LAMENTATIO – Antonio Rodriguez de Mata
LAMENTATIO – Manuel de Sumaya
AdLaudes:CHRISTUSFACTUSESTà4voix, HernandoFranco



1. Escuela Estatal de Musica de SLP

PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

HOLY WEEK IN MEXICO (16th-18th CENTURY)

Here we have a new approach to polyphonic works preserved in novohispanic codex: liturgical music for the Holy Week in Mexico City. For the first time brought together in a single recording, these pieces illustrate the talent of several chapel masters of the Mexico City Cathedral: Hernando Franco (from 1575 to 1585), Antonio Rodríguez de Mata (from 1620 to 1643), Luis Coronado (from 1643 to 1648), and Manuel de Sumaya (from 1715 to 1739), to which is added a work by the composer Juan de Lienas (first half of the 17th century), thus covering a period of more than 150 years.

A look at the history of polyphony at the Mexico City Cathedral shows that some works by Hernando Franco (16th century), as well as compositions by 17th-century chapel masters, remained in use even in the last quarter of the 18th century. Thus, hearing Franco and Sumaya together may seem unprecedented to us, but it was not at the time when their compositions were performed from the great lectern (Picture 2). The apparent musical traditionalism of the Mexico City Cathedral was neither rigorism nor immobility, but simply the transmission of a living tradition.

HOLY WEEK IN THE IMPERIAL CITY OF MEXICO

Matins are the nocturnal office of the Catholic Church and are intended to be sung in the darkness and deep silence of the night. This has not prevented, throughout history, solemn matins from generally being sung at dusk the previous day in cathedrals and other sanctuaries: the matins of Holy Thursday, for example, were sung on Wednesday, and similarly on the following days.

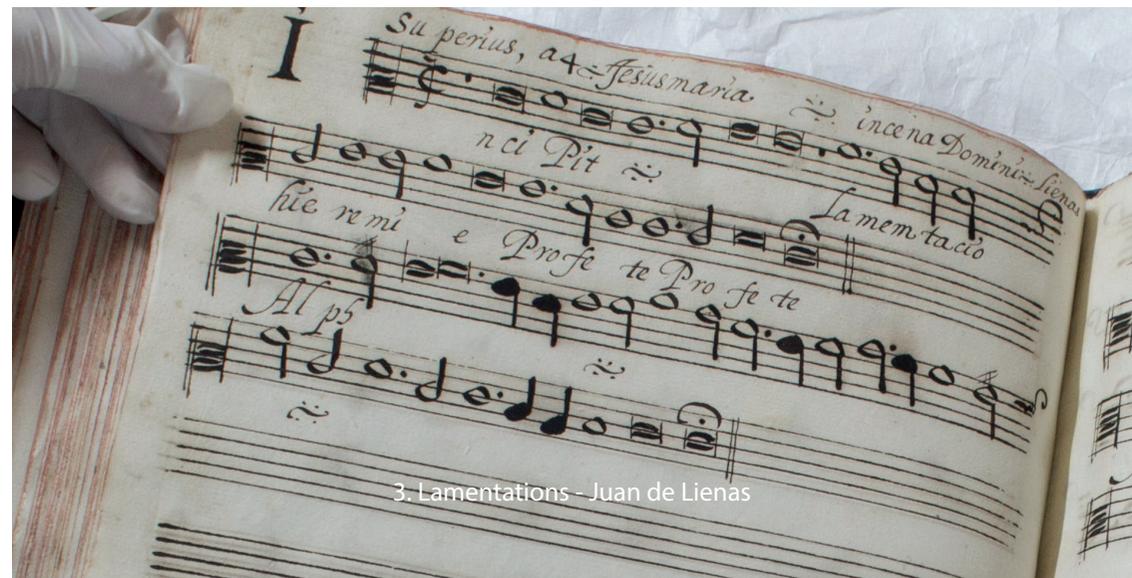
Solemn matins consist of three major parts, or nocturnes, each formed by three psalms with their antiphons and three lessons or readings with their responsories, among other prayers. In the Tenebrae Matins, which take place from Thursday to Holy Saturday, the lessons are taken from the book of Lamentations of the Prophet Jeremiah. Those of Holy Thursday, which appear in this recording, were composed by Juan de Lienas, whose works appear only in the manuscripts of two convents of Conceptionist nuns in Mexico City:

that of the Incarnation and that of Saint Inés (Picture 3), for which he probably worked as a musician. His lamentations are found in the Carmen Codex, which belonged to the convent of Saint Inés, as well as in one of the six manuscript books of the convent of the Incarnation, now preserved at the Newberry Library in Chicago.

An old ceremonial preserved at the Metropolitan Cathedral of Mexico lists, with meticulous descriptions, the rites and ceremonies to be followed each day of the year, according to the customs of this temple (most following a centuries-old tradition). According to this manuscript, in the Mexico City Cathedral, only the first lesson of the first nocturne was sung in polyphony, 'with the greatest solemnity and harmony of music, voices, and instruments'. Moreover, the degree of solemnity gradually decreased between the matins of Thursday and those of Saturday, as the pain of Christ's Passion imposed a sober austerity.



2. Cathedral lectern



3. Lamentations - Juan de Lienas

The accompaniment of the bajón (Picture 4), the most important of the 'minstrels' instruments, occupies a central place in this recording. Popular until the 19th century, this instrument is distinguished by its ability to support the choir, both in polyphony and plainchant.

Each year, at four in the morning on Holy Thursday, a carillon of bells reminded all the clergy of the city, the viceroy, the audience, and the courts that they had to receive communion and listen to the sermon during the day's mass, which began at eight-thirty. Immediately after, vespers were recited, without music, and at three in the afternoon, since bells were now forbidden by the ritual, the sound of the great rattle of the tower was heard for half an hour. The chapter then proceeded to the ceremony of the washing of the feet or mandatum, followed by the prayer of compline, and at four in the afternoon, the Tenebrae Matins for the next day (Good Friday) were solemnly sung.

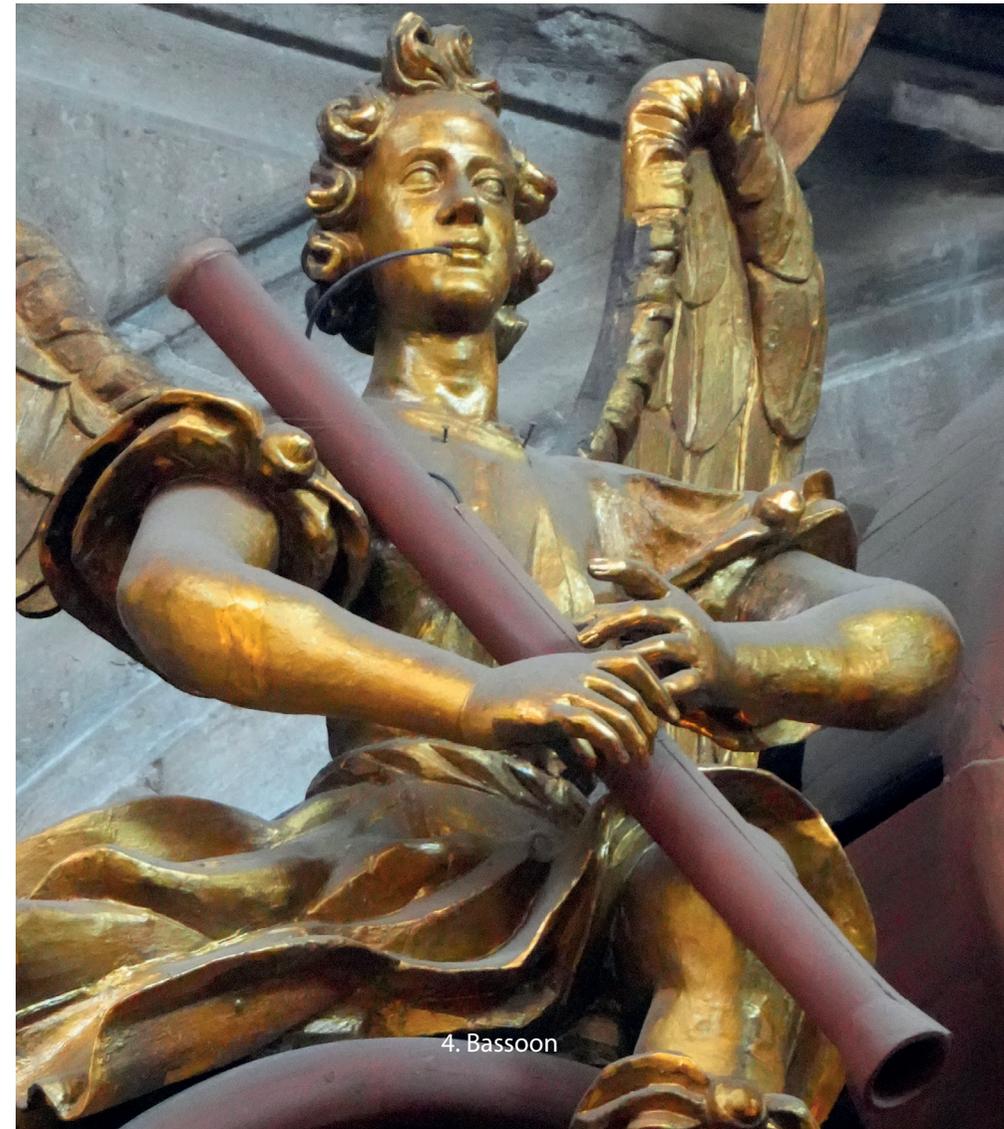
Antonio Rodríguez de Mata, whose long musical career took place in the service of the cathedrals of New Spain, is the composer of the Lamentations for Good Friday performed here. He is found at the Cathedral of Puebla in 1603 as a bajón player and alto singer, and in 1613 he was hired at the Mexico City Cathedral as a singer and composer, where, in 1620, he became chapel master until his death in 1641.

On Good Friday, the solemn offices began at eight-thirty with the 'Mass of the Presanctified'. On that day, the missal prescribed the singing of the Passion according to Saint John, followed by the sermon and the long ritual of the adoration of the cross with the relic of the Lignum Crucis, kept in the chapel of relics of the Mexico City Cathedral. In this cathedral, the Passions were sung by three ministers: the chronicler, the secondary characters, and Jesus Christ; a high voice for certain women's responses, and the entire chapel for the synagogue's responses in polyphony. In this program, we hear the version by composer **Luis Coronado**.

He was hired as a singer from 1620 and became 'lieutenant' of the chapel master from 1623, making him the natural successor upon the death of Rodríguez de Mata. During his time at the cathedral, he worked alongside eminent musicians such as the famous African-born soprano Luis Barreto, the renowned organist Fabián Pérez Ximeno who succeeded him upon his death, and a very young Francisco López Capillas, who would lead the chapel in 1654. As on previous days, at three-thirty in the afternoon compline was recited and shortly after the Tenebrae Matins for Saturday were sung. Here, two versions of the Lamentations for Holy Saturday are offered: one by Antonio Rodríguez de Mata, and the other (almost a hundred years later) by **Manuel de Sumaya** (Picture 5). The latter was a distinguished disciple of Antonio de Salazar and a

priest like most of his predecessors (except Salazar himself), ordained in Mexico City in 1705. Sumaya received and extended the living polyphonic tradition of the Hispanic Baroque.

The antiphon *Christus factus est* by **Hernando Franco**, the most famous chapel master of the 16th century, concludes this program. His music was copied and preserved in large choir books over the next two centuries. This is undoubtedly a sign of respect from the chapel masters who succeeded him, as Franco was the first great composer of the metropolitan cathedral.



4. Bassoon

Sabbato Sancto. M^o Sumaya

C lamentati o
ne Jere mi' e Pro phe ta.
He th He
th.

C lamentati o
ne Jere mi' e Prophe ta.
He th

M^o Sumaya.

C lamentati o ne
Je re mi' e Pro phe ta.
He
th.

C lamentati o ne
Je re mi' e Prophe ta.
He
th.

5. Lamentation for Holy Saturday by Sumaya

THE BOOKS

Today, nine passions composed in Mexico at the beginning of the 17th century are counted for the liturgical use of the cathedral as well as for the convents of the Incarnation and Saint Inés. The Mexican passions, including the works of **Antonio Rodríguez de Mata** and **Luis Coronado**, were developed according to the Hispanic (neo-Mozarabic) tradition of plainchant, while the Roman rite was widespread in Spain during the 17th century. This is attested by a set of liturgical books from the Toledan tradition (1582, 1712, 1788) which contain the tones of the passion in plainchant that must have been used in the responsorial interpretation of this repertoire between the end of the 16th century and the end of the 18th century. The existence of these sources from the Mexico City Cathedral, as well as references provided by other documentary collections (chapter acts, ceremonies, etc.), favor the rapprochement of this genre and its liturgical contextualization within the celebration of Holy Week in Mexico.

Some of these lamentations, particularly those of **Juan de Lienas** (Holy Thursday) and Antonio Rodríguez de Mata (Holy Saturday), are incomplete. We have therefore restored the missing verses of the latter with the plainchant of Toledo (1582, printed in Salamanca) to show the organic link between monody and polyphony. Following research carried out on the collections of the Cathedral of Guadalajara, we discovered that these Toledan lamentations had been entirely copied into the large choir books, for the use of this church, which demonstrates the strong interest in maintaining this precious repertoire alongside Roman chant in New Spain.

The polyphony books, preserved under the references P01 (Picture 6) and P03 at the Mexico City Cathedral, contain works intended for the celebration of Holy Week. Among others, there are four passions by composer Luis Coronado, as well as the Tenebrae Lessons for the 4th, 5th, and 6th days of Holy Week, composed by Hernando Franco, Antonio Rodríguez de Mata and Manuel de Sumaya, the latter being, with Juan de Lienas, one of the few natives of “Mexican” soil. To this day, Luis Coronado remains the only composer whose complete set of four Passions has been preserved in the Mexican collection.

Moreover, some of these works —such as the Lamentations for Good Friday by Antonio Rodríguez de Mata and the *Christus factus est* by Hernando Franco— also appear in the polyphony books of the women’s convents of the Incarnation and Saint Inés in Mexico¹¹. While the music of Juan de Lienas is present only in the books of these convents, the presence of works by the great cathedral masters testifies to their musical authority. The chaplains of the Mexico City Cathedral could intervene during the great liturgies, such as those of Holy Week, within the convents of nuns like that of the Incarnation. They then received remuneration for their various activities at the convent, notably for singing the passions and other pieces with the musician nuns.



6. Book of Passions

THE CORO, SANCTUARY OF SONG

Since 2016, every year, we have walked through the most important religious buildings in Mexico to immerse ourselves in the volume and organization of the spaces dedicated to music in cathedrals and convents. Walking in the footsteps of the old chapel masters, in the very places where the musical works of this disc were sung, considering the architectural setting in which they resonated, seems essential to us in order to understand the acoustic and behavioral conditions that the singers had to implement to fill the space. What an emotion to be near the immense lectern located in the center of the coro (choir) of the Mexico City Cathedral (Picture 7), recalling the admirable testimony of Manuel de Sumaya (c.1678-1755), chapel master of the cathedral, when he reported on the state of his chapel:

... even at a distance, it is known that it is necessary to have a 'powerful voice' and great solidity in the voices [gran cuerpo y solidez en las voces], because some singers who sing at the lectern sound more than when they sing on the gallery, where one cannot perceive what they sing... While other churches use fewer singers; to which I can answer two things. The first is that these churches are smaller in their construction and every voice resonates in them; but this church [the Mexico City Cathedral], due to its size, needs very massive and corpulent voices [unas voces muy masivas y corpulentas]. The second is that these churches do not have the [same] attendance [nor the same congregation] as this Holy Church.

What Sumaya tells us about the quality of the voice defines well what the singer's voice must be, which is not a camerata voice (chamber) but indeed a capella voice (church). Xavier Bisaro, in his Guide historique et pratique du plain-chant about the singer's voice, perfectly summarizes this point:

... While being subject to this vocal ideal, the cantor's voice had to adapt to its chosen architectural setting, the church, which determined acoustic and behavioral conditions that the singers had to take into account.

The coro is located in the first third of the cathedral, surrounded by a high, richly decorated wall. Two organs face each other on the sides (Picture 8), while the imposing stalls allow the singers, ministriles and canons to be arranged in such a way as to make every movement and intervention harmonious. Above the stalls, the bas-reliefs represent prophets, apostles, evangelists, doctors of the Church, etc., reminding the singers that their action is part of the continuity of those who preceded them in faith. The back of the coro is adorned with the large allegorical painting Jesucristo en la



7. The choir



8. The two organs

Gloria (1684) where, around Christ, a group of musician angels is depicted in two choirs (Picture9).

The only opening of the coro is at the other end: an immense iron gate surmounted by a Calvary scene (Picture 9), allowing the singers and canons to observe the liturgical action taking place in the last third of the building. Thus, the faithful, located between the coro and the choir towards which they are turned, do not see the singers, who remain 'enclosed'. This liturgical theatricality nourished the rise of Baroque art. Thanks to a profusion of visual and sound means, everything is done so that anyone entering the sanctuary, believer or not, is seized by the greatness of the divine mystery: who sings? Men or angels? Both! This is the whole meaning of this staging, which illustrates that the Church is both that of Heaven (the Trinity, the Virgin Mary, the angelic world, the saints) and that of Earth in its human reality: 'Heaven and earth are full of your glory' (from the Sanctus of the Mass). Everything is thus organized for the Epiphany (manifestation of what is hidden) of the heavenly Kingdom, whose desired purpose is the transfiguration (transformation) of the world.



9. Jesus Christ in glory



RECONSTRUCTING A LOST SOUNDSCAPE

WITH GRAVITY AND PAUSE

The requirement for slowness in the performance of this musical corpus is not unique to Spain; it is also found in Italy and France, notably in funeral chants, those of Holy Week, and during major solemnities such as Easter, Christmas, Pentecost, etc. This characteristic concerns both composed music and plainchant. This slowness was perceived as an appropriate contribution to the solemnity of the occasion and the gravity of the ceremony. This practice invites us to place the tradition in its context, taking into account the ideals of singing the Divine Office: *pausa, gravedad y solemnidad* (pause, gravity and solemnity). These principles lead singers to utter the word intelligibly, to give weight to the words, and to mark long silences, which reinforces the gravity of the message and captures the listener's attention.

ORNAMENTATION

Gravity in the execution of polyphony —called in Spanish 'organ music' (*canto de órgano*)— and plainchant does not mean the absence of ornamentation. To embellish these Holy Week chants, we relied on the various procedures described in the treatise *Arte de melodía sobre canto llano y canto de órgano* (Art of Melody on Plainchant and Organ Chant, anonymous, circa 1520). Although the ornaments are adjusted to the liturgical context, they remain present and participate in the rhetoric: the art of eloquently expressing things. In this context, musical ornamentation is akin to the illumination of books of hours: both highlight the sacred dimension of the word. Moreover, the ornamentation of the chant enters into symbiosis with the architectural ornamentation, this baroque art that abundantly illuminates religious buildings in Mexico.





SUPERIUS
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TÉNOR
BASSE
DULCIANE

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Christophe Gautier & Jean-Marc Vié
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