

Music in the cathedral (1531-1664)

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The destruction of the Aztec Empire and the construction of Spanish-style cities happened extraordinarily fast. Quite apart from our personal feelings about the imposition of a regime conceived by foreigners or pillage and the enslavement of an entire culture, we must learn to imagine ourselves in the minds and hearts of the conquerors. Rather than think only of their greed for riches and power, we must remember their firm faith in the Catholic church and the sacred duty to spread the Gospel among the inhabitants of the new world who were then considered to be savages.

The most profound motivation of the conquistadors could not have been stark avarice and the ruthless desire for power. The religious zeal of the first missionaries is unquestionable, and the conquest's success was largely based on the educational projects stemming from the genuine desire to save souls. In this, music played a leading role and was used deliberately and transcendently, influencing not so much through its art as through its effects on the consciousness.

Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians and Jesuits successively built their missions and played their

music in the conquered lands. Brother Pedro de Gante, with the personal authority of the Emperor, was the first and most eager music teacher in New Spain.

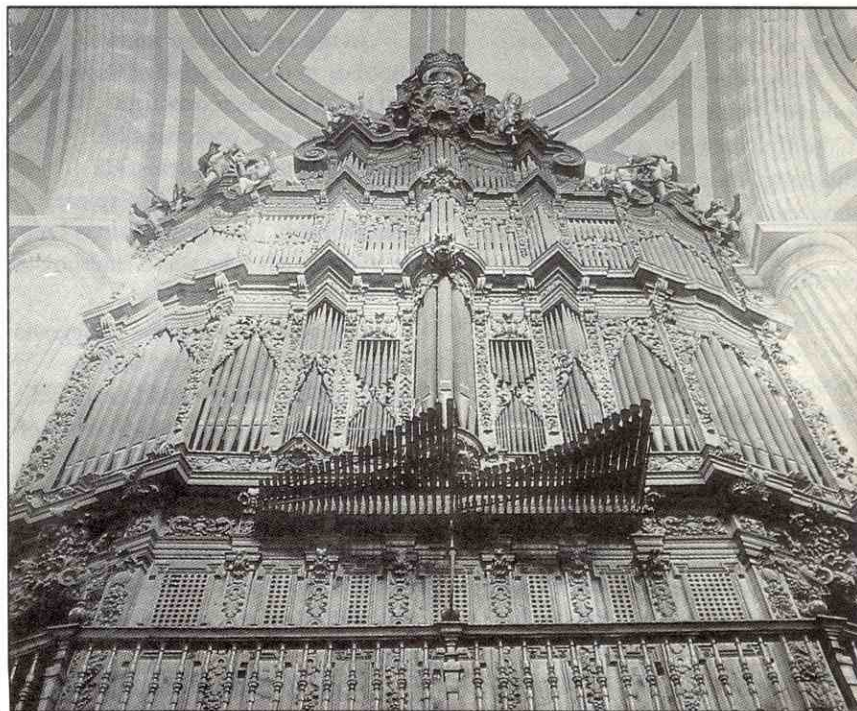
In 1531, the year in which Pizarro invaded Peru, a new city was founded in Mexico. It was called Puebla de los Angeles and was typically Spanish in all senses of the word. Its cathedral, built by native and African labor was

to be so splendid as to rival the cathedrals of Spain.

The creation of a New Spain as a faithful copy of the Old Spain was irreversible. Imported musicians and artisans trained the native Mexicans to make instruments, directed their energy and their labors down Spanish paths, and generally attempted to integrate them into the economic and social currents of the mother country.

The Spanish ecclesiastical authorities of Mexico brought with them from Spain the organization and customs of the Spanish clergy, particularly those of the cathedral of Seville. Puebla showed itself to be somewhat independent by adopting a model based on the cathedral of Toledo.

Music in Mexico adapted itself to new needs. The greatest influence was Cristóbal de Morales. His music moved the congregation in the cathedral when Charles V died, and his works, particularly his magnificats, served as models for



The organ in the cathedral of Mexico City.

* Sub-director of The Library of Mexico.



Geo Ackerman, *La Catedral y la Plaza Mayor, 1810.*

music in cathedrals all over the New World.

Among non-Spanish composers the most popular was Palestrina, whose works are known from Cuzco, Lima, Quito, and Bogota through Guatemala and the cathedrals of Mexico.

In Mexico, the printing press rolled out more than 200 music books in the 16th century, with plainsong and polyphonic music for religious services.

If we recall the history of the North American colonies settled by the French, the English and the Dutch, and the paucity of the culture they inherited, the speed with which the Spanish crown sowed the seeds of culture and assimilated the cities of the New World into Spanish-influenced urban life reveals itself as an astonishing achievement.

Economy, politics, and religion all mirrored European models. Art too, first an imported and later a native creation, matured, but with music we find gaps in the historical chronicle.

The first choirmaster of the cathedral of Mexico City was Hernando Franco, who was born in 1532 in Garovillas, in Spain. His birthplace was close to Alcántara in Extremadura, the homeland of the conquistadors.

At the age of 10 he was a choirboy in the cathedral of Segovia and by 14 he was receiving a significant wage exercising his remarkable musical talents. He studied under Jerónimo de Espinar, who probably also taught Tomás Luis de Victoria when he was a choirboy in Avila.

During his seven years in Segovia Franco spent his holidays with the family of Hyerónimo and Lázaro del Alamo. The latter was a choir-mate of his. In that house he met the rich nobleman Matheo de Arévalo Cedeño, who was to become an official in Mexico City. Arévalo Cedeño took Lázaro to Mexico with him in 1556 as choirmaster of the old cathedral.

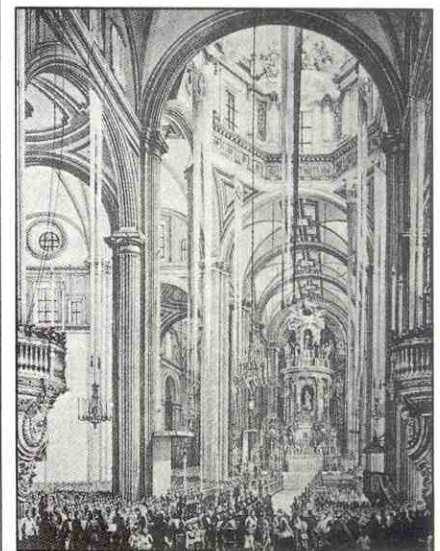
There is evidence that Franco accompanied Arévalo Cedeño on some of his voyages, but only in 1573

does Franco's name appear in the ledger of the cathedral of Guatemala, as choirmaster, with Hyerónimo del Alamo and his cousin, Father Alonso de Trujillo, appearing as members of the choir.

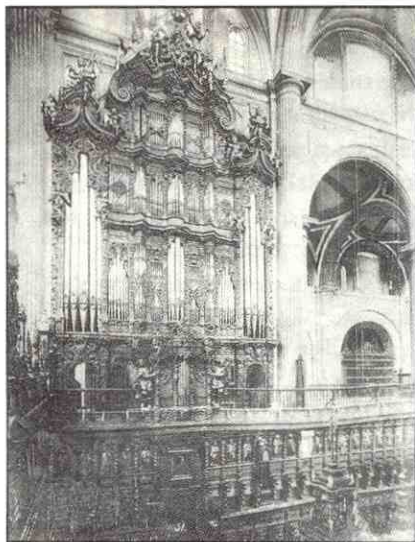
There is also a pay cut recorded in the Guatemala ledgers, and it may have been this that motivated Franco and his two choir-mates to seek employment elsewhere.

By late 1574 the three musicians had arrived in Mexico City. Franco was appointed choirmaster at the Metropolitan Cathedral, succeeding Juan de Victoria, who had in turn succeeded Lázaro del Alamo. For the next seven years, Franco received generous financial support for the Cathedral's music, support which later dried up due to the construction of the new cathedral, started in 1573.

Franco's services were of such high quality that Archbishop Moya y Contreras requested a special benefice for him. The request was addressed to the king of Spain. "Franco is a clergyman who leads an exemplary life. His abilities as a composer assure us a musical legacy that is equal to any in Spain, and he has thoroughly reorganized the cathedral choir."



Interior of the cathedral of Mexico City, lithograph, 1855.



The organ viewed from the choir.

The benefice was granted on the 1st of September 1581. However, due to changed circumstances in 1582 the cathedral chapter cut wages so drastically that Franco resigned and the vocalists and instrumentalists refused to play. Finally, pressure from both musicians and the general public made the chapter reconsider their decision. After lengthy financial negotiations the choir returned to work.

As he grew older Franco's responsibilities grew less, but he was still choirmaster when he died in 1585. He is buried prominently in the chapel of the old cathedral.

His successor Juan Hernández, who had been a lead in the choir, showed his admiration for his predecessor 25 years later as he presented the chapter of the cathedral with a lovely copy of the 16 scores of Franco's magnificats, two in each of the eight keys. At the time his choral collection was considered so important that the chapter agreed to buy the volume. Though Franco did not leave a large number of compositions, several sources bear witness to his popularity. Some of his works can still be found in Guatemala and the cathedrals of Mexico City and Puebla.

Mexican polyphony

The organs in the Cathedral of Mexico City are the most important ancient instruments in the Americas.

Historical chronicles remain somewhat confused by the abundance of contradictory and false dates. Nevertheless, one can quote, with only slight reservations, the note published in *La Gaceta de México* of the 23rd of October, 1736: "Two sumptuous organs were delivered to the metropolitan cathedral, each one a beautifully carved case of exquisite woods, seventeen rods high and eleven long. Placed in the tribune, it fills the whole horizontal space and more than half of the vertical space reserved for it. The entire device consists of a single wind chest which supplies air to both sides through five large bellows which wind all divisions of the organ without being either seen or heard. They are contained inside the upper box and are so large that each one contains over 3,350 flutes. One can obtain a harmonious mixture of diapasons, mixes, cornets, trumpets,

clarions, nazards, echos, drums, bells, small bells, violins, high pitched flutes, reed stops and all the other effects of which a full-scale organ is capable."

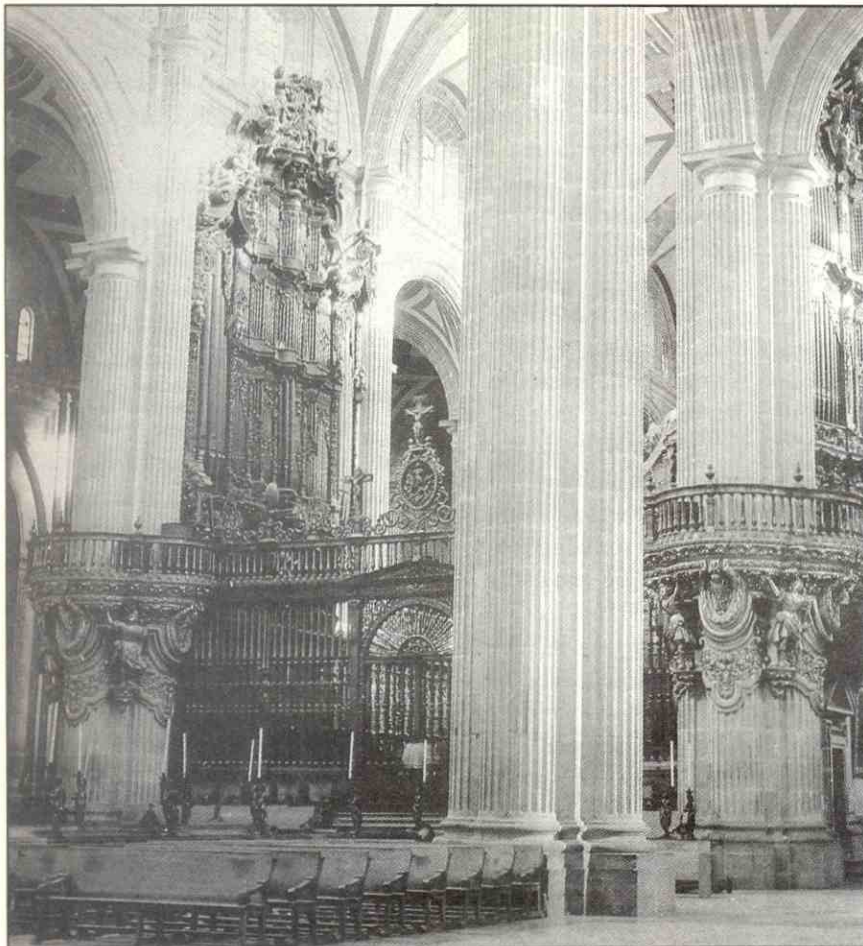
Standing on both sides of the choir, each organ is of different manufacture and history. The one on the eastern side -on the right when one enters through the main door- is the epistle organ, also known as the "Spanish organ."

It arrived in Mexico in 1696, built by Jorge de Sesma and sent to Mexico for assembly in the Cathedral itself by his assistants Tiburcio Sans de Izaguirre and his brother Félix, two Spaniards. According to original sources, before it was enlarged it had 76 or 78 registers.

Spanish choirs are located at the center of the church -as it is in the cathedral of Mexico City- and this positioning had greatly influenced the development of cathedral music. The members of the choir sat facing each other, thus accentuating the



"The Cathedral Under Construction, 1764," anonymous work in the Franz Mayer collection.



The beautiful columns and elegant ironwork of the cathedral of Mexico City.

antiphonal and polyphonal effects of the compositions.

Juan Gutiérrez de Padilla was born in Málaga around 1590. He began his career in Andalucía and received his musical training under Francisco Vázquez as a member of the Málaga Cathedral Choir.

Around 1613 he was appointed choirmaster in Jerez de la Frontera, and three years later he had moved to the cathedral of Cádiz where he was to remain until 1620.

It is not known when and why Padilla took ship for New Spain, but October 1622 already found him a singer and assistant choirmaster in the cathedral of Puebla, which was then one of the most important musical centers of this continent. On the 25th of September, 1629, he was appointed

choirmaster, where he remained until his death some days after the 22nd of April, 1664.

The arrival in 1640 of the cultured and powerful bishop, Juan de Palafox y Mendoza, the first bishop of Puebla and later bishop of Mexico City, spurred the completion of the cathedral which was finally consecrated in splendor on the 18th of April, 1649. By that time Padilla's prestige and his economic position were firmly established. Certain sources mention the workshop for musical instruments that he had set up in his home.

In the colonial cathedrals, as in Spain, the choirmaster was responsible for the musical program and for rehearsing the choir. In Puebla, the choirboys worked and lived in the *Colegio de San Pedro*,

which was associated with the San Juan Seminary for Advanced Studies. The students of both schools attended the cathedral and were taught plainsong, polyphonic, and instrumental music. Under Bishop Palafox the quality of the music was extraordinary, and the beauty of services in the cathedral of Puebla surpassed those in the capital.

Padilla's choir was large and well trained, capable of double choir polyphony. It had fourteen choirboys and two hundred and eighteen adult singers. Some of the vocalists also played instruments, such as the famous harp-player Nicolás Grinon and the composer and organist Francisco López Capillas, who was Padilla's main rival, and who became choirmaster in Puebla later on.

When Juan Gutiérrez de Padilla died in Puebla he left behind an excellent collection of compositions, some of which can be found in *Choir Book No. 15*, Puebla Cathedral.

Padilla's works are influenced by Spanish polyphony, yet at the same time they tend toward early baroque in their slightly increased chromatism, a preference for the double choir, lively rhythms, and grave lines with instrumental support.

His imagination equalled his technical ability to create expressive and original scores, inspiring textures and rhythms which conjure up, by their sensitive use of words, vibrant vocal images. Like many Spanish choirmasters, Padilla composed a number of vernacular songs and carols for special holidays. His song cycles include courtly romances, saucy ballads known as *jácaras*, lyrical dialogues with accompaniment, and gypsy dances. His religious works include motets, funeral music, high masses, and one passion[✠]