



IIE, UNAM.

Organ: detail.

### Francisco López Capillas: organist and choirmaster

Uncertainty surrounds Francisco López Capillas's birthplace: some say it was Andalusia and others Mexico between 1612 and 1615. He was probably a student of Juan de Riscos, choirmaster of Jaen. Once he had been ordained as a priest, he began work as an organist and fagotist in the city of Puebla on December 17, 1641, often replacing the resident organist Pedro Simón.

In May 1648 he went to Mexico City. He may have been encouraged in this venture by Fabián Ximeno, the resident organist at the Metropolitan Cathedral who had just paid an official visit to Puebla. López Capillas presented the Cathedral authorities with a choirbook containing his own compositions and when Ximeno died he was appointed to the two posts of Cathedral organist and choirmaster. Though he was exceptional in both posts and even had the opportunity to compose the music for the consecration of the new Cathedral, he constantly requested to be relieved of one. It was not until 1668, 34 years after his appointment, that his request was granted. Joseph Ydiaquez was employed as organist.

The date of López Capillas's death is also uncertain, but it is known that he died between January 18 and

# Music in the Cathedral (Part II)

*Fernando Alvarez de Castillo\**

February 7, 1673. His musical legacy is of the utmost importance; it includes eight masses, a group of excellent magnificats kept in manuscript form in the Cathedral archives, and an excellent choirbook which he sent to Spain and is now in the National Library of Madrid. He often composed for four voices but never for a double choir. His music, so beautifully fresh and elegant, kept to conservative structures.

### José de Nasarre: the cathedral organ maker

In 1730, the organ maker José de Nasarre, who had apparently built the Guadalajara Cathedral organ, was commissioned to extend the range of the *Epistle* organ, which was at the east end of the choir. Once he had completed this task in 1734, the Chapter then commissioned him to

build a second organ, known as the *Gospel* or the Mexican organ, and to modify the *Epistle* organ, which was built in 1696, so that it would be identical to the new one. José de Nasarre completed his masterpiece in October 1776, and it was inaugurated on December 3, 1776.

In 1817, the *Gospel* organ was modified once more. Both organs were restored between 1975 and 1977 by Flentrop, a Dutch company, because they had been badly damaged by a fire on January 18, 1967, caused by a short circuit.

### Antonio de Salazar: choirmaster and teacher

Antonio de Salazar is the last composer we shall mention here. He was born around 1650 in Seville. The little that is known about his life may be found in archives in Guatemala

*Many of the musical scores composed by the talented choirmasters at the metropolitan cathedral lie buried in the archives. Only when they have been dug up and performed in their original setting – if not their original context – can the true quality of composition be appreciated.*

\* Sub-director of the Library of Mexico.



where he was choirmaster before his appointment to the same post in Puebla on July 11, 1679. He held that post for nine years.

In 1688, Salazar was one of five candidates for the post of choirmaster of the Metropolitan Cathedral, but his rivals offered little opposition and he began his new job on September 3.

As a musical expert, his work was not restricted to composition and the direction of the choir. He also took on the tasks of ordering the Cathedral music archives and of supervising the installation of the first Great Organ—built in Madrid—at the east end of the choir in the Cathedral.

He was recognised by one and all as an excellent teacher. Among his most outstanding students were Pérez de Guzmán in contrapuntal composition, who became the choirmaster of Oaxaca Cathedral, Francisco de Atienza y Pineda and the famous Manuel de Zumaya, who not only held the post of choirmaster at the Metropolitan Cathedral and later at Oaxaca Cathedral but was also the composer of the first opera written in America.

Around January 1710, Salazar placed his state of health on record, pointing out that he was ill and almost

blind, for which reason he handed over some of his responsibilities to Manuel de Zumaya. No record remains of the date of his death, but it is known that he died before May 27, 1715.

Salazar's contrapuntal texture is free-flowing, but his style is conservative in its long phrases, open spaces and subtle contrasts. Some of his choral works were written to be accompanied by instruments. Even though he composed a great number of works very few were preserved for posterity.

In the eighteenth century Juan Tellez Girón, Juan Pérez Zamora and José Suárez were the resident organists in the cathedral which housed José de Nasarre's magnificent organ.

#### The maintenance of the organs

The Chapter was quite aware of the importance of these new instruments and sought a specialist who would keep them in tune and in a perfect state. José de Nasarre recommended José Cacula, who had worked on the construction of the Valladolid organ, but the Chapter chose Francisco Pelaez since he had previously been the cathedral tuner. He was given a salary of 400 pesos a year. However,



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he was advised that he should leave a surety to guarantee the quality of his work and that all minor repairs would have to be done at his own risk and cost, since the Cathedral would only pay for major repairs.

Now that the Metropolitan Cathedral had such magnificent organs, the musical repertoire grew considerably. Manuel de Zumaya, Ignacio Jerusalén y Stela, Mateo Tollis Della Rocca and Antonio de Juana, the last choirmaster before Independence, left a fine musical legacy of organ scores, which are still in the archives. It is for this reason that the organists play Spanish music in the concerts given on these Great Organs.

Many of the choral works of the Mexican colonial period remain buried in the archives. The analysis and preparation of these scores would make sense only if the performance bringing them back to life does justice to them.

Cathedral music of the colonial period should be seen within the context of centuries of colonial life, but we have to look beyond the celebrations of the discovery of the Americas to appreciate their true worth. **M**



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