

Music in the Metropolitan Cathedral (final part)

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Music versus the visual arts

It would be true to say that almost all western music falls into two genres, although they tend to overlap. On the one hand is religious music which has enlivened -and still does- church ceremonies and rites; on the other is secular music, which is created, cultivated and cast aside by the people. Ecclesiastical institutions have preserved their musical art throughout the centuries despite the changes in taste. However, there are hardly any means of keeping a record of secular music.

Music, as Uwe Frisch says, does not exist until it is heard. Indeed, music only becomes a reality when it is played and loses its reality when the last echo dies away.

Whatever our distance in time from a musical score may be, it still evokes a rather subjective and hazy response; it has, so to speak, a vague and mythical air about it which is quite different from the concrete reality achieved in other art forms.

Just as colonial architecture and paintings were destroyed and abandoned during the *Reforma*, so those scores, which had delighted the eye and ear and filled the naves during several centuries of gestation in different influences and novel trends, fell into oblivion.

Hardly had a style, a form or a model of composition been established in New Spain when a new kind of composer, who, if he did not come from Europe was steeped in European trends,

tried to infuse those original and growing concepts in European art with a genuinely indigenous flavor and offer them to the eclectic group of theatre and church-goers.

When the chronicles of the time mentioned the musical art of New Spain, they always did so with not unjustified pride.

We should not forget the power music has to move people and mirror their traditions. Fray Juan de Zumarraga said that music was more effective than sermons in converting the indigenous peoples to Christianity; and it was also reported that people went to mass to listen to music rather than to worship God. The same is still true today.

Our historical memory is rather hazy as far as music is concerned. It is worth remembering that any

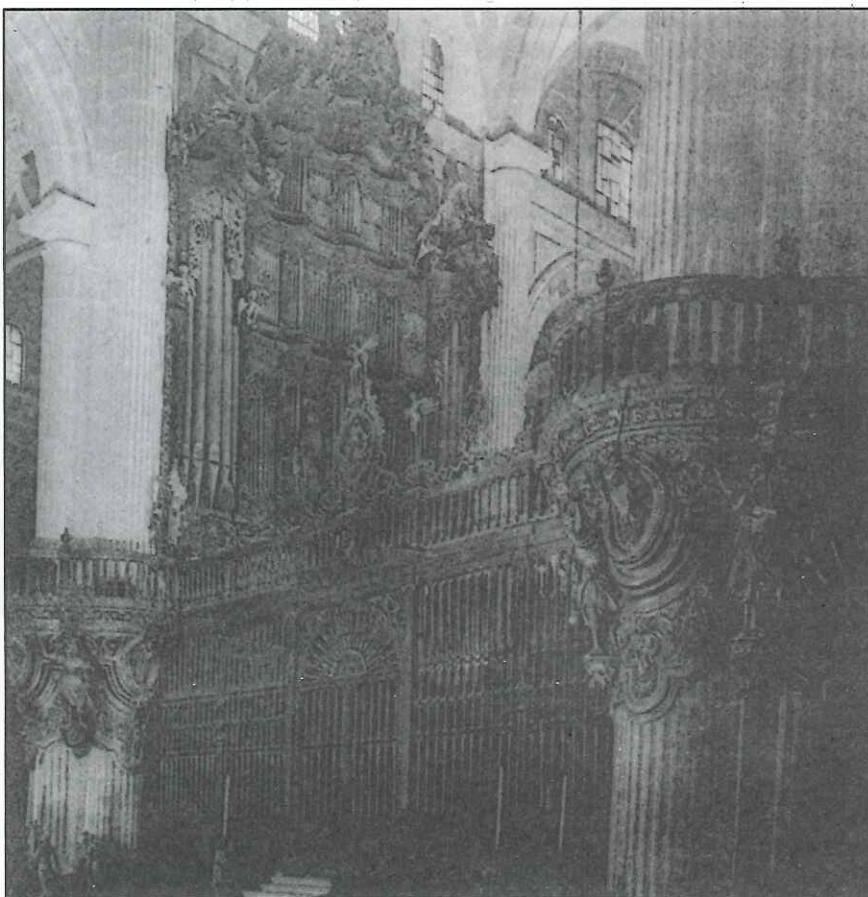
performance of our musical heritage, cast as it is today as an historical record, is bound to be distorted in one way or another by the distance in time from its context and function.

Nevertheless, some magnificent moments in the history of Mexican music, which was formerly the secret of the most important church in New Spain, may be relived, despite the distortions and background noises of a concert hall, in live recordings. Music has one great advantage over the visual arts of the colonial period: it does not age or deteriorate with time. It can be performed after centuries of silence and does not even need restoring. There are so many works in the field of visual arts —and perhaps this is the compensation— that their survival is constantly under threat.



Night view of the Metropolitan Cathedral.

* Sub-director of The Library of Mexico.



A Chinese grille in the Metropolitan Cathedral.

Hernando Franco on the picket line

It is thought that Hernando Franco was born in Garrovillas in Spain in 1532. From the ages of ten to seventeen, he was a choirboy at Segovia Cathedral and he arrived on American soil in 1554. It is known that he was choirmaster in Guatemala from 1573 to 1575 and was appointed as choirmaster of the Metropolitan Cathedral in Mexico City on May 20, 1575.

In 1582, Father Franco, who was earning 600 gold pesos per year, headed a protest movement against a decision taken by the Chapter on July 6 to halve the choristers' salaries, as the cost of their wages and upkeep exceeded that of the construction of the church.

Everybody was informed of the Chapter's decision by the secretary, who received a very direct reply from Father Franco: they went on strike from

July 13 to August 3. This was one of the first strikes in the history of New Spain, with the difference that, on this occasion, as Estrada put it, "it was not a case of downing tools but of silencing voices". The third Archbishop of New Spain, Pedro Moya de Contreras, kept an eye on events and finally gave his instruction that the choir and the choirmaster should be retained at their original salaries.

The Metropolitan Cathedral was the centre of piety and musical life. Attention was devoted to composing, performing and teaching church music which rivalled European churches both in repertoire and in excellence of choir and orchestra.

One of Hernando Franco's works, *Santa María*, is a rendering of the second part of the Ave Maria in Latin and Nahuatl.

Juan de Lienas

Very little is known about Don Juan de Lienas. Among the works attributed to him are two manuscripts of polyphonic music, a codex from the *Convento del Carmen*, which contains 16 works for female voices, and a volume which is in the Newberry Library in Chicago. His mournful *Salve Regina* brings to mind Cristobal de Morales' work. The Latin text comes from the original prayer. This evangelist work has no exuberant or sensual touches.

Manuel de Zumaya: a pioneer and an enigma

The work of Manuel de Zumaya embodies the grandeur of early baroque art in New Spain. Born in Mexico around 1684, it appears that he never left New Spain, which makes his work an original product of New Spanish culture. Besides composing cantatas, masses and other religious works for voice and instrument, he was the composer of the first opera written in America.

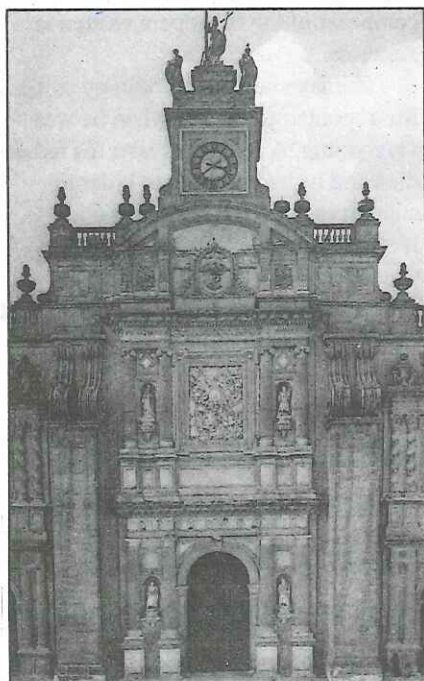
Zumaya became a choirboy at the Metropolitan Cathedral when he was very young. A few years later his father died and he had to work in order to support his mother, his sisters and himself. Aware of his talent, the Cathedral Chapter awarded him a scholarship to retain him as a permanent member of the choir.

By 1712 he had an excellent reputation as an organist and held an important musical post in the Cathedral. A very active man, he was always supported in his work by the Chapter; in the few moments of silent and uninterrupted leisure he had, he composed masses, matins, carols, anthems, cantatas and even operas.

Zumaya also founded a Cathedral orchestra which, according to records dating from April 20, 1734, included violins, violas, cellos, double basses, trumpets, horns, and fagots.

Manuel de Zumaya was last seen on May 6, 1756 in the state of Oaxaca. The date of his death is therefore uncertain, though he must have been 72 years old.

Zumaya's two Baroque arias — *Hoy sube arrebatada* and *Oh, feliz culpa nuestra!* — follow the traditional Italian style of *Aria da capo* and the orchestral accompaniment includes some wind instruments. The second piece is preceded by the customary recitative and embellished with ornaments. Vocal and instrumental techniques are particularly well



Classic and neo-classic at the Metropolitan Cathedral.

developed in the melodic structure of the second aria. What is really notable about these works, however, is their economy.

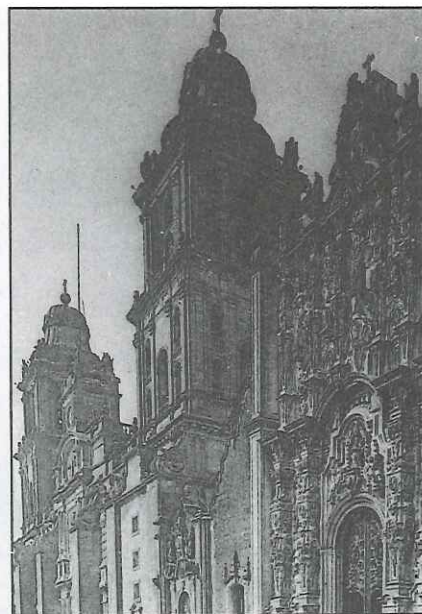
When Zumaya left the Metropolitan Cathedral in August 1739, the Chapter, after attempting both friendly and legal means to entice him back, lost all hope as he did not reply. One year later, the Chapter, now convinced that their attempts had been in vain, advertised, according to a record dated November 13, 1740, for a musician with sufficient experience to fill the vacant post. The few applicants did not meet the standard required and the post remained vacant.

The Chapter then appealed to the Archbishop to write to Seville with a view to interesting some Spanish musician in the post. In the meantime, Domingo Dutra y Andrade was appointed choirmaster.

Ignacio Jerusalén y Stella: the musical miracle

It was at this time that they thought of Ignacio Jerusalén y Stella, a Neapolitan musician born around 1710 and engaged in Spain as a violinist until his arrival in Mexico in 1742. Jerusalén made his name in New Spain as musical director at the Coliseum, where Italian opera was performed in Mexico. It was for this reason that the Chapter invited him, upon Canon de Hoyos's recommendation, to become the Cathedral choirmaster, though he would still have to apply through the official channels. Jerusalén's presence demoralised Domingo Dutra y Andrade, whom Dr. Antonio Armendariz and Dr. Joseph García de la Vega diagnosed as suffering from "a chronic illness and afflicted with hypochondria, melancholy and insomnia", for which they recommended a "lengthy treatment and a change of air".

Ignacio Jerusalén was finally appointed to the post of choirmaster of



Classic and Baroque at the Metropolitan Cathedral.

the Metropolitan Cathedral on November 3, 1750. He started his work as official composer by writing a *Miserere*, a *Te Deum* and a *Salve* and giving horn lessons — and probably violin lessons as the violin was his own instrument — to the children of the *Colegio de Infantes*.

Despite his respectability as a musician, it appears that Jerusalén led a rather dissolute life as he was always heavily in debt. He worked as a musician for both the Cathedral and the Coliseum, where he often had problems for neglecting his duties.

The choral and orchestral excellence of the Cathedral music during Jerusalén's time in office earned him the name of "the musical miracle". After nineteen years of service to the most important cathedral in the Americas, he died around December 25, 1769. He composed more than two hundred works in Latin, including carols, religious arias and orchestral passages between verses, which resemble the Italian *ritornello* and might be considered the first purely instrumental works in Mexican colonial history. M