

Iribarren

SACRED MUSIC IN MALAGA CATHEDRAL

Cristina Bayón Álvarez *soprano*
Jorge Enrique García Ortega *countertenor*
Ensemble Il Narvalo
Federico Del Sordo *conductor*

Juan Francés de Iribarren 1699-1767
Sacred Music in Malaga Cathedral

1. Jardinera serpiente	4'42	8. Hortelanito hermoso	3'15
2. Hoy se concibe pura	4'43	9. Admite dueño amado	7'03
3. Pretiosa in conspectu	3'34	10. Deseando cantar juntos	5'19
4. Hola Jau	9'34	11. Aplaudan de las ondas	7'37
5. Puer qui natus est nobis	1'21	12. Es el poder del hombre	
6. La cierva herida	6'17	limitado	15'05
7. Conceptio tua	2'40		

Cristina Bayón Álvarez *soprano* (1, 2, 4-8, 10-12)
Jorge Enrique García Ortega *countertenor* (1, 3, 4, 8, 12)

Ensemble Il Narvalo
Federico Del Sordo *conductor*

Valerio Losito (1, 2, 4-12), Paolo Perrone (5-9),
Caridad Martos (1, 2, 4, 10-12) *Baroque violins*
Ulrike Pranter *Baroque cello* · Carlo Calegari *violone* (1, 2, 4-12)
Aníbal Soriano Martín *guitar & theorbo* · Jacobo Díaz Giráldez *Baroque oboe* (2, 12)
Mariana Fernández-Astaburuaga *transverse flute* (2, 4, 11)
Antonio Tomás del Pino Romero *organ* (1, 2, 4, 6-12),
Andalusian drum (4) & *castanets* (1, 8)
Federico Del Sordo *harpsichord* (1, 2, 4-12), *organ* (3) & *basque tambourine* (4, 10)

Having served as *maestro de capilla* at Málaga Cathedral for many years, the Spanish composer and organist Juan Francés de Iribarren spent the last days of his life at the nearby Augustinian monastery where his brother Juan was a friar. Less than a week after the *maestro's* body had been laid to rest, Juan arranged for his vast collection of manuscript scores to be delivered to the secretary of the cathedral chapter, as Iribarren had agreed before his death, on condition that, as a sign of its appreciation for his works, the chapter should not allow them to be lost or copied, or to be performed other than as part of services held at the cathedral, to prevent their becoming “vulgarised”.

Juan Francés de Iribarren Echevarría (Sangüesa 1699–Málaga 1767) received his musical education at the Royal Chapel in Madrid in the early years of the eighteenth century. He was taught there by the eminent composer José de Torres who, in 1717, recommended that Iribarren be appointed organist at Salamanca Cathedral. He obtained the post despite the fact that at the time he had not even taken minor orders, which would normally have been a prerequisite for the role. Sixteen years later, realising perhaps that his role in Salamanca would not enable him to deploy his full creative potential, he moved on to become *maestro de capilla* at the Cathedral of Málaga, the city in which he spent the rest of his life.

In the mid-eighteenth century, Málaga Cathedral was in the middle of its second phase of construction. The dynamism of the master architects involved in that project, together with that of Iribarren himself, and of the other skilled artisans in the city at the time, sculptors in particular, reveals that despite its status as a suffragan (subordinate) diocese; its coastal, peripheral location; and its population of just forty thousand, Málaga was a hive of artistic and cultural activity.

Four years after taking up his post there, Iribarren set up the cathedral's first music archive. In the course of the more than three decades he served in Málaga, he also consolidated an almost 30-strong multi-faceted team of singers and instrumentalists, including a plainchant choir, cantors, wind and string players, organists and boy choristers.

This album presents a “tasting menu” of Iribarren’s music, featuring works of different genres and from different periods of his career, to give an idea of how his style developed over the years. It is, however, limited to smaller-scale works – those calling for one or two singers, with an instrumental palette that ranges from simple continuo accompaniment to a chamber ensemble in which one or two wind instruments are added to the pair of violins virtually ubiquitous in Iribarren’s scores. As far as musical forms are concerned, three-quarters of the album is dedicated to the *villancico* – a vocal genre setting texts in the vernacular, Spanish (*villancico* deriving from *villano* meaning “one who lives in the city, or in a village”) – or to the functionally related forms of the aria and cantata, also in Spanish. There are also three motets in Latin, then the official language of the Catholic liturgy.

At this time, Italianate music was gradually being introduced into Spanish cathedrals. The so-called new style came to Málaga, and was peacefully adopted there, with the arrival of Iribarren, although this is not to say there was no debate beforehand about whether or not to accept compositional ideas that seemed to sound the death knell for the home-grown Spanish style. Iribarren’s production, however, reveals an adaptability that enabled him to work comfortably with anything from the minimal forces of cantor plus accompaniment to polychoral ensembles with a profusion of instruments. Adopting more *galant* or Classical textures from the 1740s onwards, he was also able to combine with apparent simplicity the two stylistic idioms that represent the essence of the Spanish Baroque by bringing together aspects of both art and folk music.

Since it was last catalogued in the 1980s, Iribarren’s monumental legacy has been divided into two large blocks – works setting texts in Latin and works setting texts in the vernacular. Classifying his music by language, however valid and operationally practical a system it may be, does nevertheless run the risk of obscuring his stylistic versatility when it came to writing works that were thematically but not necessarily linguistically linked. If, for example, we look at the four works included here written to celebrate the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary – one of the pillars of Catholic worship in Early Modern Spain, long before it was officially enshrined in

doctrine – we can see how he not only uses a wide variety of musical forms (motet, *villancico*, cantata), but also treats each genre in a way that enables it to convey the ineffable mystery of faith through music to listeners of all backgrounds, whatever their level of intellectual or spiritual preparation. There is a 21-year-gap between *Deseando cantar juntos* (“Wanting to sing together”; 1743) and *Jardinera serpiente* (“Serpent of the garden”; 1764), the latter work composed just a few short years before his death, but in both pieces elements of traditional Hispanic music form the canvas on which two choristers fight a battle of words. The first piece calls for a vocal technique that verges on the grotesque at times, while the second depicts the creature that brought sin into the world. By contrast, the other two works in this thematic group – *Hoy se concibe pura* (“Today is conceived in purity”; 1756) and *Conceptio tua* (“Your conception”; 1749) – are composed in a more learned style. Both date from the period in which Iribarren’s team of musicians (the cathedral’s *capilla de música*) reached its peak of artistic maturity and renown (1746–60).

One aspect that is sometimes overlooked, perhaps because words were seen essentially as a prop for the music, is that of the authorship of the Spanish-language texts. Shortly after arriving in Málaga, Iribarren approached the chapter about what he described as the shameful fact that every year the cathedral had to beg other churches for texts to set for celebrations of the major holy days (Corpus Christi, the day of the Immaculate Conception, Christmas and Epiphany). Thanks to the extensive documentation preserved in the cathedral archives, we know that the chapter listened to Iribarren and decided to employ its own official writer. From 1735 to 1749, the post was held by José Carlos Guerra, court poet in Madrid. He was succeeded, just for one year, by Alejandro Ferrer, *maestro de capilla* of the Convent of Las Descalzas Reales in Madrid, and he in turn was succeeded by Antonio Pablo Fernández, who would continue writing texts for the cathedral until Iribarren retired as *maestro de capilla*.

The devotional theme to which the greatest number of works on this album are dedicated is that of the *Santísimo Sacramento* – the most Holy Sacrament of

the Eucharist – one of the warhorses of the Counter Reformation, which placed great emphasis on the observance of communion and the belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. While the works whose appearances were awaited with greatest expectation were those relating to the Immaculate Conception and Christmas/Epiphany, *villancicos* and other pieces associated with the Holy Sacrament could be used more often and in more varied circumstances throughout the year than simply being substituted for matins responsories (as was the case with the former). Of Iribarren’s many Eucharist-related works in the vernacular, this album includes one *villancico*, *Hortelano hermoso* (“Pretty little orchard”; 1745); two arias, *La cierva herida* (“The wounded hind”; 1752) and *Admite dueño amado* (“Receive, beloved master”; 1753) and two cantatas, *Aplaudan de las ondas* (“Let the foaming waves give praise”; 1756) and *Es el poder del hombre limitado* (“The power of man is limited”; undated). The most unusual of the many different times at which such pieces were heard was undoubtedly during the *siesta*. It was at this moment of rest halfway through the day (the Spanish word derives from the Latin *bora sexta*, the sixth hour, or noon), while the Eucharist was still exposed for adoration by the faithful, that attendance started to falter. With the express purpose of bringing people into what might otherwise have been an empty cathedral, the chapter arranged for these works to be performed, so that by some kind of synaesthesia the *siesta* would become a magnificent act of public worship.

As mentioned above, the *villancicos* most eagerly awaited by both congregation and chapter were those written for Christmas. Their texts, in Spanish, were printed on sheets of paper handed out before the matins service on Christmas Eve, to be sung in place of the standard responsories. We have only included one of Iribarren’s many Christmas *villancicos* here, but it is unquestionably one of his masterpieces. *Hola, Jau* (1751) presents a theatrical recitative dialogue between two characters, Jau and Batín, the latter encouraging the former to get out of bed and see the light in the sky that heralds the birth of the Saviour. Moved by the vision of the newborn child, they then join together to sing a gentle lullaby, whose strains are interrupted by a lurking

wolf, its appearance depicted by a kind of *batalla*, a genre with which Iribarren, as an organist, would have been very familiar indeed.

The final two works on the album are the motets *Pretiosa in conspectu* (“Precious in the sight of the Lord”; 1742) and *Puer qui natus est nobis* (“The child that is born unto us”; 1754). The first, for solo voice and continuo, is for use in services for apostles and martyrs during Eastertide, while the second, with violin accompaniment, celebrates the birth of John the Baptist, forerunner of Christ. Both motets show just how skilled a composer Iribarren was, capable of taking a short Latin text of clear functional nature and using it as the basis for a miniature musical masterpiece.

While making no claims whatsoever to have exhausted the immense potential offered by a legacy of almost a thousand works, this album aspires to be more than just a fine recording of a selection of Iribarren’s compositions, however beautiful each individual piece may be. It stands as a rare document in sound which, despite the limitations that are unavoidable even in historically informed performances, offers a tantalising glimpse into the kaleidoscope inside which the dazzling talent of one of the most prolific composers of the late Spanish Baroque explodes into an infinity of brightly coloured patterns.

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Translation by Susannah Howe

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Clockwise from top left:
Cristina Bayón Álvarez, Jorge Enrique García Ortega, Federico Del Sordo