

Música Antiga of Girona

Christmas Concert

Auditori de la Mercè Sunday December 17, 19h. Presentation of the concert at the same auditorium at 18:15h.

1-Joan Barter (Lleida, Christmas 1671): Afuera afuera mozos (Outside, outside boys)

2- Anonymus (around 1690): Hoy los flamencos Señor (Today the Flemish, Lord)

Break

3- Josep Pons (Girona, Christmas 1792): Como vieron los zagales. (As the shepherd boys saw)

4- Rafael Compta (Girona, Christmas 1795): Un pastor y un estudiante. (A shepherd and a student)

Final part: compositions for two choirs, two violins, two oboes and two thoroughbasses.

This year Musica Antiga de Girona is dedicating the Christmas concert to two completely different epochs: one is from before 1700 when the courtly style of the House of Austria from Madrid was fully predominant. The second one corresponds to the time just before the military conflict with the French. The first piece is a short carol by Joan Barter (Mequinensa 1648- Barcelona 1707) who was chapel master at Lleida cathedral and later in Barcelona. The Christmas Eve liturgy in the cathedrals included the singing of psalms from the three parts of Evensong services (nightly monastic prayers) prior to the celebration of Midnight Mass. During the XVII and XVIII centuries in Catalan cathedrals each of these Evensong services, of short duration and sung in gregorian style, was accompanied by brief carols in Spanish, which was then in vogue as a literary language. They were serious works, often polyphonic and focussing on the mystery of the Incarnation. The third and last of these carols, however, was more frivolous and contained subject matter that was not strictly religious. At the end of the XVIII century these short carols became known as burlesque carols. "Afuera afuera mozos" (Outside, outside boys) belongs to this style. The piece was sung on Christmas Eve 1671 in the old cathedral of Lleida. The text does mention the Holy Child, the Three Kings and several saints. Most of it, however, was dedicated to the fiestas with bulls that the author affirms were traditionally held on Christmas day. There was a tradition of chasing bulls in Lleida on the feast day of St. Anastasio, the city's patron saint, as a document from 1627 records. It was a traditional celebration that was held in the old city Born, where there used to be tournaments between medieval knights at the end of the XVI century. The anonymous piece "Hoy los flamencos Señor" (Today the Flemish, Lord) is unmistakably from Girona as it refers to the German soldiers who were present in the city at the end of the XVIII century. There are still barracks in Girona that are called after them. The term "Flemish" referring to Germans is not unusual as can be seen in the last stanza where "manteles alemanicus" is mentioned. In the text Catalan and Spanish expressions are mixed with others that are supposedly German, but which are in fact Latinisms. It is not clear whether the "Lord" in question is the Holy Child or Don Diego de España, the official of the troops.

Josep Pons's work is completely unknown. Born in Girona, (1770-Valencia 1818), a choir boy in the cathedral chapel, he was later to be named chapel master of the same cathedral in 1791. He only stayed there for two years - two extremely difficult years owing to the abolition of the French monarchy, the beginning of the revolutionary wars

and the influx of a large number of refugees in Girona, fleeing from the barbarities of those conflicts. Girona society was taken aback by these unexpected changes and the present carol, in both its lyrics and musical style, clearly reflects the fears of those times. It was not sung, as would be traditional, during the third part of the Christmas mass reserved for more profane subjects, but in the second and for this reason the text refers to a large number of eucharistic themes within the general framework of Christ's birth.

Rafael Compta's work is also a carol from the second part of the Christmas Eve mass, but it is totally burlesque. That is to say it is situated in a religious context but it conveys neither a moral nor a theological lesson. The casual style and the frequent resort to not very literary jokes can be explained by the terrible historical events the city had been through in that year 1795. Girona, had enthusiastically donated money and given human support to the war that Godoy had declared on the French Republic after the execution of Louis XVI. This support was impelled by many refugees living in the city. Their initial sympathy was soon to change and was transformed into a growing fear on seeing that the easy victories against France became continual defeats in the face of a highly motivated popular French army that crossed over the frontier and was impossible to stop. The Bourbon government did not react either. Eventually, Godoy made peace with the French just a few months before the Christmas when this carol was heard. So finally Girona was not besieged. These explanations help us to understand the text of the carol; it is merely a form of musical escapism from the strong tensions between those who supported and those who opposed the political ideology of the French whose unbelievable strength had been shown several months before. But this carol is also quite singular for another reason: in the next to last movement Compta uses the tune of the catalan carol *El Noi de la Mare* (The Mother's Son) up till now one of the oldest known instances of the use of this tune, if not the oldest. There are different theories about its origins; some relate it to Celtic Galician music, but the indication *gayta* (bagpipes) on the music sheet mainly refers to the kind of accompaniment. Many people will probably be surprised that the text is in Spanish.