



(LEMS 8086, formerly released as LLST 7269)

# Choral Music of the Great Spanish Masters

Pedro Escobar  
Cristobal de Morales  
Francisco Guerrero  
Thomas Luis de Victoria

The Wellesley Chamber Singers,  
Peter Sipple, Director

“Never in Spanish history were more eminent musicians gathered in one cathedral than in Seville during the first quarter of the sixteenth century.” The judgment of Robert Stevenson in his book *Spanish Cathedral Music in the Golden Age* is borne out by the works presented here. During the years 1507-1513, Pedro de Escobar was the chapelmaster at Seville. Almost certainly, one of the choirboys under his tutelage during that period was Cristóbal de Morales, who, though he may not have studied formally with Escobar, was in a position to benefit from the advice and example of the older man. A closer relationship existed between Morales and Francisco Guerrero, born in Seville in

1528. As a young man, Guerrero was a student of the middle-aged Morales, who taught in Seville while on leave from Rome in 1545. And though the association between Guerrero and the younger Tomás Luis de Victoria (born probably in 1548) was less close, the two men were familiar with each other's compositions. Indeed, in 1587, Guerrero tried to lure Victoria to succeed him as chapelmaster of the cathedral. Had Victoria found the climate of Andalusia more to his liking, he might have accepted the position, thus linking the four composers even more closely and permitting us to extend the period of Sevillian pre-eminence to the end of the sixteenth century. It is nonetheless true that the careers of these composers, neatly covering four generations and 120 years, can be seen as a chain of artistic influence which in large part determined the character of music in the Spanish Renaissance.

Concerning the Magnificats of Morales, Stevenson includes the following judgment, put forth by Adriano Banchieri in 1611: "Among the numerous settings by musicians who have entwined the Song of the Blessed Virgin Mary with garlands of most fragrant flowers, using plain-song of all the eight tones, the most grateful are those of Morales for four voices: worthy, because of their fidelity to the plainchant, of perpetual memory." Indeed, Stevenson continues, the settings of Morales enjoyed "phenomenal success in a century when every industrious composer from Ludwig Senfl in Munich to Hernando Franco in Mexico City was busy writing Magnificats. Only when it is realized that well over 400 different composers between 1436 and 1620 left magnificats, and that those of Morales tower above all, excepting only Lassus', will one be in a proper frame of mind to appreciate these particular masterworks" (Stevenson, page 81).

In addition to its overall beauty and its "fidelity to the plainchant" (sung here by the men), the variation on the third tone is notable for its three sections to which Palestrina added "si placet" lines (add them if you please).

They are the "Fecit potentiam", the "Esurientes", and the "Sicut locutus est"; in each case the Palestrina additions are rendered here by the bass recorder. As the most interesting manuscript evidence for the popularity of Morales' magnificats, Stevenson notes that "they enjoy the distinction of being the only works enriched by the greatest master of the Roman school with parts of his own contriving."

Because they, too, are unique among the accomplishments of the great cathedral composers, the three songs of Guerrero from *Canciones y villanescas espirituales* should also receive special attention. Though "espirituales" in tone and text, the songs are more in the vein of semi-secular carols. In fact, at least ten of the entire collection of sixty-one were written originally, perhaps as early as 1550, with secular lyrics - -the works of "yeasty Andalusian personalities who had not yet broken into print" (Stevenson, page 200). Perhaps partly out of respect for his lost youth, but surely tempered by the nearly forty intervening years as a chapelmaster, Guerrero reworked the original poetry, added to the number of "canciones", and, in 1589, published the entire collection with sacred lyrics under the title as we now know it.

Recorded here are numbers 19, 18, and 26. The refrains of each song, whimsical in tone, consist of short paradoxical thoughts: 19.) He who created this sweet Virgin has this night become her child". 18) "Holy virgin, the King of Heaven is your Son and our

strength: how can such a splendid birth occur in a manger?” and 26.) “To a crying infant come three kings in adoration, because the little one has the power to grant kingdoms, life, glory, and heaven.” Each of these delightful refrains is followed by a “copla” which comments or moralizes upon the text of the refrain.

With one additional comment, concerning the motet “Pastores loquebantur”, we fully acknowledge our debt to the scholarship of Robert Stevenson. He points out that this motet, generally attributed to Victoria, is undoubtedly by Guerrero, and was included as a courteous gesture by the younger composer in his *Motecta Festorum Totius anni* of 1585. Not only had it been published previously by Guerrero in 1570 – a fact missed by cataloguers and historians who looked only at the 1585 Victoria collection - - but, Stevenson points out, the presence of the two bass parts was entirely uncharacteristic of Victoria’s writings. This Christmas motet is a marvelous example of modulating textures and harmonies which, in musical fashion approaching the madrigalism of a century later, tell the story of the nativity as it appears in Luke 2: 15b – 16.

Here, then, is a representative selection of the awesome choral music of the great Spanish Renaissance masters.

-- Peter W. Sipple

The Wellesley Chamber Singers, who have been singing together since 1969, have performed in and around Boston under their present director, Peter Sipple. Mr. Sipple is on faculty at Wellesley College. Among the singers and instrumentalists are both professionals and amateurs, drawn together by their mutual admiration for the masses, motets, and madrigals of the Renaissance.

The Wellesley Chamber Singers have previously, on the Lyrichord label, recorded two masses of the Renaissance (LLST 7247).

Sopranos: Cynthia Atwood, Gene Bland, Anne Johnson, Elspeth Pruett, Margaret Sipple, Susan Whitcomb.

Alros: Roberta Humez, Eva Linfield, Nancy Moore, Laura Schall, Lynn Weber.

Tenors: Wallace Atwood, George Bland, Malcolm Hall, Ronald Sampson.

Basses: David Friend, Thomas Kelly, John Kruse, James Loehlin, Gordon Pruett, Allen Rossiter.

Recorder: Stephen Light, Paula Tatarunis.

Tenor viol and krummhorn: Eva Linfield.

Bass viol: Carol Lewis.

Recording Engineer: David friend, David Clark.

Cover Painting: Martin de Soria (Spanish, fl. 1471-1487) from the Retable of S. Peter, Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Cover Design: Margaret Shepherd.

Recorded in the Chapel, Newton College of the Sacred Heart, Newton Centre, Mass.

Pedro de Escobar (fl. 1480-1513)  
In Nativitate Domini.  
In Ephiphaniae Domini.

Cristobal de Morales (ca. 1500-1553)  
Puer natus est.  
Magnificat tertii toni.

Francisco Guerrero (1528-1599)  
Canite tuba in Sion.  
Pastores loquebantur.  
Three songs from *Caciones y villanescas espirituales*:  
Ojd, ojd, una cosa divina.  
Virgen sancta.  
A un nino llorando.

Thomas Luis de Victoria (ca.1548-1611)  
O Magnum Mysterium.



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