

Workshop Preview.

Music for Lent from 17th Century Mexico - Francisco López Capillas.

Tutor: David Hatcher. Saturday 24 February, Bartestree Village Hall, near Hereford.

A workshop for singers and instrumentalists: viols, recorders, curtals (all sizes), cornetts, sackbuts and large shawms (tenors and below) A = 440

The Spaniards who brought the music of Europe to 'New Spain' found considerable talent and aptitude among the native Nahuatl Indians. In 1625 the English Dominican, Thomas Gage, wrote of the religious music he had heard in Mexico City that:

"...the performances were so exquisite that he dare say people were drawn to their churches more for the delight of the music than for any delight in the service of God."

Our February workshop will concentrate on pieces by a notable composer of this period who was born and died in Mexico City - Francisco López Capillas (c.1608 - 1674). We shall work on his parody mass *Missa Aufer a Nobis* and the motet on which it is based.

Admitted to the choir of Mexico Cathedral around 1625, Capillas would have studied under its *Maestro de Capilla*, Antonio Rodríguez de Mata. He spent some years as dulcian player and organist at Puebla Cathedral, serving under Juan Gutiérrez de Padilla, leaving in 1648. The next record of his whereabouts comes in 1654, when he presented a carefully illuminated choirbook to Mexico Cathedral. Still preserved in the cathedral's archives, it contains three parody masses including *Aufer a Nobis*. Capillas served in Mexico Cathedral for twenty years and, although he had his disagreements with the Cathedral authorities, by the end of his career he was earning 1,000 pesos a year, the largest salary ever received by a church musician in Mexico throughout the colonial period. He was one of the most talented 17th century composers of the New World.

The edition of the music which we shall use in our workshop was prepared from the Mexico Cathedral manuscript by David Hatcher specifically for a recent performance by Border Voices in Leominster.

The delicate motet is a delight. Dedicated to the Virgin Mary, it is compact but highly expressive. Verses 1 and 3 employ two simultaneous melodies, one ascending in the treble and tenor and one descending in the alto and bass, to depict the sinful nature of man. Verses 2 and 4 provide an effective and surprising contrast, praising the Virgin in vigorous rhythms in triple time - a tang of the New World interrupting the *stile antico* polyphony inherited from Europe. The melodies of verses 1 and 3 are then worked into the texture of the mass.

It appears that a strong sound was favoured in 17th century Mexico. A contemporary account declares: *“In each choir there are usually 15 or 16 Indians, which is the minimum necessary, for they have weak voices and do not sound well if there is not a group.”*

We'd like a good number of singers, too! We are also keen to have viols, recorders, curtals, cornetts, sackbuts and large shawms. Instrumental accompaniment of polyphonic music was a common practice in Spain and was enthusiastically adopted in Mexico. The instruments do not merely support the voices but are a musical element of equal importance.

Click on this link http://www.bmemf.org.uk/uploads/6/6/0/5/6605763/mexican_info.pdf for an article by David with fuller information about the music brought to Mexico by the Spanish.

Marna Gowan