

THE SONGS OF PEDRO XIMENEZ ABRIL Y TIRADO (1784-1856): POETRY AND ART MUSIC IN POSTCOLONIAL BOLIVIA

An online seminar co-hosted by The Institute of Latin American Studies (School of Advanced Studies, University of London) and the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, under the Open World Research Initiative (OWRI) of the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The list of contributors are given at the end of this report.

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MEETING REPORT

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This seminar was the launch event for a project to make the first professional recordings, public concerts, and performing edition of a selection of the songs of Pedro Ximénez Abril y Tirado (PXAT) from the several hundred manuscripts held in the National Library of Bolivia, Sucre. The project falls under a developing strand of the artistic and scholarly work of Guildhall School, focusing on Hispanic music, inaugurated and led by Professor Sir Barry Lfe.



Left to right: Nigel Foster, Rafael Montero, Jonathan Eato, during the recording session on 19th August 2020, St Matthias Church, Stoke-Newington, London.

Pedro Ximénez Abril y Tirado was one of Latin America's most successful and prolific composers of the early 19th century, whose work spanned the critical period of the establishment of independent Latin American states in the period after the end of the Spanish Empire. Known at the time as "El sinfonista de los andes", he learned his craft during colonial years, but was able to contribute to the body of early postcolonial repertoire. In the 20th Century his work fell from view. It is only now, with the greater interest in postcolonial studies and the rehabilitation of indigenous musics that his work has begun to receive scholarly and artistic attention. His work exemplifies the cosmopolitanism and cultural mobility that was an important strand in the establishment of a distinct Latin American cultural life. At the peak of his career he occupied a prestigious position as director of music at Sucre Cathedral, the most important cultural and religious city of the newly created state of Bolivia, under the direct patronage of President Andrés de Santa Cruz.

These secular songs exemplify this cosmopolitanism in both words and music. The poems are drawn eclectically from European and Latin American sources (including, unusually for the time, some women poets, such as Caroline-Stéphanie Félicité Du Crest (France 1746 - 1830), and the Ancient Greek poetess Sappho). In his post-colonial period he set to music South American poets like Esteban Echeverría and Manuel Martínez, from Argentina and Mexico respectively, who took their inspiration from the culture in which they were living, working in the neoclassical and romantic poetic style. Echeverría's writings also inspired the Argentinian constitution after independence from Spain. The music also shows stylistic variety. Whilst the predominant style draws on European models (with similarities to Mozart, Haydn, and Bellini), there are also strong indigenous influences in some, particularly in a set of "Jaravi", songs drawing on the ancient traditional genre of Andean music and indigenous lyric poetry.

In all of these respects Pedro Ximénez exemplifies the cultural syncretism that has been a prevailing feature of Latin American music at many historical junctures. At a time when the impetus to de-privilege the European classical canon grows ever stronger, Ximénez is a neglected composer of the highest quality whose works deserve wide contemporary exposure and integration into the corpus of established art songs.

The project was conceived and initiated by Rafael Montero, freelance singer and project leader, an Argentinian of native American Bolivian descent. In a conversation between Dr David Irving (ICREA, Barcelona) and Juan Conrado Quinquiví Morón, a musician and researcher based in Sucre, Bolivia, participants heard how Montero established a partnership with Morón, who has taken the primary initiative to start transcribing and editing the 300 or so songs whose original manuscripts (hitherto in private ownership) have recently been acquired by the National Archive of Bolivia. To date some 40 of the songs have been transcribed, and it is from these 40 that a selection is being made for the project. Morón has designated Montero to be the first to record these songs.

PXAT was a prolific composer, and also composed many works other than songs including 40 symphonies, masses, vespers, salves, tonadillas, music for guitar, piano, Christmas carols and songs. Participants learned that there has been a gradual revival of regional interest in PXAT, which has led to a range of publications and performances, and a commercial recording of all extant works for solo piano. Even so, less than 5% of his works have been performed in modern times, and the songs hardly at all.

In a conversation between Professor Barry Ife (Guildhall School of Music & Drama) and Dr José Manuel Izquierdo König (musicologist and author of doctoral dissertation on Tirado) it was noted how unusual PXAT's career trajectory was, at a time when most musical formation was offered by the Church. PXAT was supported by his family, prominent in the

Arequippan elite, and pursued a career focused mainly on secular music until at the height of his reputation he was appointed Chapel Master and Professor of Music at Sucre cathedral, after which point his output concentrated on church music. However, it was during these later Sucre years that these secular songs, many written earlier for guitar (which was PXAT's great passion), were rewritten for piano, in view of changing attitudes to the guitar in newly postcolonial Latin America.

In conversation with Professor John Sloboda (Guildhall School of Music & Drama) Rafael Montero introduced the three songs recorded specifically for the seminar. Because of Covid-19 restrictions on access to performing and recording spaces, recordings were made with a modern concert grand piano, although the main project will use a fortepiano of the type in common use at the time. Two of the songs (*A Maria*, and *A Dolores*) were Cancións, which – as observed by pianist Nigel Foster - have strong elements of the bel canto style of composers such as Bellini (a link confirmed in the discussion pointing to PXAT's writing out of bel canto ornamentation of the song of an Argentinian contemporary). The third song (Jaravi No, 11 A Donde vas, dueño amado) draws heavily on the indigenous Andean form, which is a lament for the loss of loved ones, and which, in this contemporary performance is dedicated to all those who have died from the Coronavirus in recent times. This performance is now available on youtube at <https://youtu.be/qxpuJR0-nZE>.

The seminar concluded with a lively discussion from among the 60 or so participants. There was a notable concentration of Spanish-speaking voices from the South American continent, complementing the European attendees, a positive feature of an on-line event such as this, which compensates for the unusual restrictions under which this event was prepared for and held. Particular thanks are due to Dr David Irving and Rafael Montero, who through their real-time translations ensured that Spanish speakers could better follow the proceedings.

CONTRIBUTORS

Rafael Montero	(freelance singer and project leader)
Nigel Foster	(freelance keyboard player),
Jonathan Eato	(recording engineer)
Juan Conrado Quinquiví Morón	(musician and transcriber of the songs)
Dr José Manuel Izquierdo König	(musicologist and author of doctoral dissertation on Tirado)
Professor Sir Barry Lfe	(scholar of Hispanic culture and music)

Chair – Dr David Irving, ICREA Research Professor at Institució Milà i Fontanals (CSIC - IMF) Barcelona, Spain

Seminar convened by Professor John Sloboda (Guildhall School of Music & Drama) who wrote this report, with opening and closing remarks from Professor Linda Newson (Director of the Institute of Latin American Studies, School of Advanced Studies, University of London)



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