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Venezuelan Cathedral Music

The rich musical heritage of Venezuela's Colonial period has been noticed by native scholars as José Antonio Calcano and Juan Bautiste de la Plaza. A further study of the music's historical roots, extent and scope of influence as well as information about specific Venezuelan composers is, however, very much in order, for abundant data still remains unpublished. One of the most important aspects of Venezuelan Colonial music is the country's Cathedral music and to this end the present article will be dedicated.

As early as June 14, 1532 Rodrigo de Bastides, first Bishop of Coro (and of all Venezuela) signed a document organizing his diocese. In this statement he described the Cathedral's *chantria* to which no one might be presented if he was not a musician in plainchant etc. In fact one of the duties of the *Chantrre* was to teach the ministers of the Church to sing.

By 1582 there is documented evidence of Masses sung to Our Lady on Saturday mornings and for the Blessed Souls on Mondays.¹ It is possible of course that only plainchant was used in the liturgical services, yet by January 20, 1613, the name of Sebastián Araujo, singer of polyphonic music, is found in the Cathedral archives. He is mentioned as "cantor de canto de órgano y llano" bearing the office of *sochantre*. While the *chantrre* was to attend and rule the choir in plain song, the *sochantre* was to rule in "canto de órgano" and instruct the clerics and singers, assisting at vespers and sung Masses.²

In Caracas the *Actas del Cabildo* of the city of July 31, 1592 mention the organist Melchor Quinttela, while in Coro the Cathedral archives indicate that not until March 8, 1635 was an organ agreed upon "as it is said that there are parish churches in the diocese which have organs brought from Spain but the Cathedral still does not possess such an instrument."³ The Cathedral *Cabildo* records in Coro end with the date of January 24, 1636.

With the transfer of the Cathedral to Caracas, musical activity continued and flourished even more. Daily music instruction was given within the Church by 1640⁴ and in 1657 the name of Miguel Jiménez Aguila appears as "músico cantor." At the same time the Cathedral had 6 choirboys and a *bajonista*.⁵ In fact, mention of the 6 choirboys is first made in 1639⁶ and a "maestro de música", González Cordero in 1671.⁷ A chapelmaster appears in the *Cabildo* acts of 1672 when three of the six choirboys are noted as being "músicos."⁸ In 1678 Joseph de la Roza is listed as *bajonista*⁹ and Joseph de León as organist by 1682.¹⁰ Other *bajonistas* were Miguel Cervantes (1737), Cayetano de Castro (1748), Joseph Bernardo Ovalle (1790), Joseph Rodríguez (1791) and José Angel Lamas (1796).

In addition to the afore-mentioned musicians, early organists included Blas de León (d. 1658), Joseph de León (organist from 1658 until 1669), and Joseph Torrico (1669). An additional small organ was willed to the Cathedral in 1707 by Bishop Diego de Baños y Sotomayor. Thirty years later the organist Jacob de Miranda was made chapelmaster upon the death of Silvestre Media-Villa and as late as 1770 the Cathedral still possessed two organs.

Mention of the well-known Ambrosio Carreño as interim organist appears in the account books of 1745¹¹ and by 1752 he wrote of the Cathedral's need for violins. In 1775 while Carreño was chapelmaster, the Cathedral Acts mention the beginning of "two positions of tiple or soprano (income of 80 pesos each annually) and two violinists with a salary of 150 pesos each."¹² The Cathedral finally purchased two new violins in 1778.¹³ Instruments and musicians heard in the Cathedral were not strictly in the permanent employ of that Church, however. For larger feast days using more demanding music, outside musicians and instruments were brought in.¹⁴

In 1780, while Juan Gabriel Liendo was chapelmaster, the Cathedral increased its positions of singers and instrumentalists. The *Cabildo* Act of August 22, 1780 lists the 6 choirboys mentioned previously here plus *two more*, the *sochantre*, organist, chapelmaster, *bajonista*, and *four new* positions of *singers* (bass – with an annual income of 200 pesos, alto – 200, tenor – 150, tiple – 100). In addition, five positions of instrumentalists were created: 2 violins, 2 oboes or trumpets and a cello with the salary of 150 pesos each.¹⁵

Another Cathedral organist was Manuel Sucre who died in 1781 and was replaced by his assistant Joseph de la Luz Urbano. Eight years later Alejandro Carreño was named chapelmaster

with the income of 200 pesos annually.¹⁶ In March of 1791, however, it is Trinidad Espinoza who signs the receipt documents previously signed by Alejandro Carreño¹⁷ and by February 14, 1793 this former musician is called “interim chapelmaster” in the Cathedral manuscripts.¹⁸ Finally in 1797, Cayetano Carreño, who held the Chair of Music in the Seminary until February 1793, is mentioned as Cathedral chapelmaster on March 14.¹⁹

Among all the musicians connected with the Cathedral, perhaps two of the best known are Cayetano Carreño (b. August 7, 1766 – d. March, 1836) and José Angel Lamas (b. August 2, 1775 – d. December 10, 1814). Some of Carreño’s works include a Salve Regina, a Mass a 4, Office of the Dead (Invitatory, three lessons), Mass of the Dead, Tantum Ergo and Sacris Solemnis, In Monte Oliveti, Constitues Eos, Pésame a la Virgen, Tristis Anima Mea, Gloria Laus, Vespers and a possibly spurious Amici Mei. The works of José Angel Lamas number at least 40 compositions including the well-known Mass in re, Popule Meus, Misereres, Salve Reginas, Invitatories and Hymns.

It is hoped that some of Venezuela’s Colonial musical treasure can be heard also in our present day. In the meantime, an attempt has been made here to indicate some of the origins of Cathedral music listing various instrumentalists and composers with special attention to the invaluable data related to performance practices. Venezuelan Cathedral music affords the scholar a rich field for further investigation.

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¹ *Actas del Cabildo Eclesiástico*, Libro I, fol. 13 and 13^v (9 de febrero, 1582)

² *Ibid.*, fol. 183 (20 de enero de 1613)

³ *Ibid.*, Libro 2, fol. 71^v (8 de marzo de 1635)

⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 118^v (2 de abril de 1640)

⁵ *Ibid.*, Libro 3, fol. 31 (9 de abril de 1657)

⁶ *Ibid.*, Libro 2, fol. 109 (6 de agosto de 1639)

⁷ *Ibid.*, Libro 4, fol. 136 (10 de abril de 1671)

⁸ *Ibid.*, Libro 4, fol. 78 & 78^v (27 de mayo de 1672)

⁹ *Ibid.*, Libro 5, fol. 47^v (22 de octubre de 1678)

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, fol. 93 (20 de julio de 1682)

¹¹ Archivo General de la Nación, *Iglesias X*, fol. 423^v

¹² *Actas del Cabildo Eclesiástico*, Libro 15, fol. 260^v (17 & 21 de febrero de 1775)

¹³ *Ibid.*, Libro 17, fol. 92^v (18 de mayo de 1778)

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 285^v

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Libro 18, fol. 92-94 (22 de agosto de 1780)

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Libro 18 *dup*, fol. 188

¹⁷ Archivo de La Nación, *Iglesias XLVI*, fol. 297

¹⁸ *Actas del Cabildo Eclesiástico*, Libro 19, fol. 46-47

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, fol. 366^v

