

**Review: Jorge Matta, *Manuscrito 50 da Biblioteca Geral da Universidade de Coimbra*, vols. I - II (Lisboa, Colibri, 2008, 2012), viii + 174 pp. ISBN: 978 972 772 836-7 (I) - ix + 110 pp. ISBN: 978 989 689 189-3 (II)**

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A WELCOME ADDITION TO PUBLICATIONS OF VOCAL MUSIC preserved in Portuguese sources of the Renaissance and early Baroque periods is this edition by Jorge Matta of villancicos preserved uniquely in MM 50 at the Biblioteca Geral da Universidade de Coimbra. Presented in two volumes, the edition is comprised of a collection of over thirty ‘sacred’ villancicos and other works in the vernacular—in Castilian (traditional for the era), in Portuguese and in pseudo-African dialects—that were popularly performed around the middle decades of the seventeenth century in the Augustinian Monastery of Santa Cruz in Coimbra, one of the most significant musical institutions in early modern Portugal. Indeed, the villancico was intensely cultivated at this monastery, and this extremely important Coimbra manuscript witnesses the blossoming of the genre there during a time when these styles of villancicos were composed and universally performed throughout the Iberian Peninsula, both in the church and as musical interludes in theatrical plays. Besides in the Coimbra sources, other extant settings of villancicos from this era are preserved in the Biblioteca Pública in Évora. The popularity of the villancico in Portugal during the first half of the seventeenth century may especially be witnessed in the catalogue of part of John IV’s music library, *Primeira parte do index* (1649),<sup>1</sup> where over 2000

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<sup>1</sup> *Primeira parte do Index da Livraria de Musica* (Lisbon, Paulo Craesbeeck, 1649). Facsimile edition by Mário de SAMPAIO RIBEIRO, *Livraria de música de El-Rei D. João IV: Estudo musical, histórico e bibliográfico* (Lisbon, Academia Portuguesa da História, 1967), vol. 1. The *Index* is also available online <[imslp.org/wiki/Primeira\\_parte\\_do\\_index\\_da\\_livraria\\_de\\_musica\\_\(João\\_IV,\\_Dom\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Primeira_parte_do_index_da_livraria_de_musica_(João_IV,_Dom))>.

titles of villancicos, predominantly set to music by Spanish composers, are listed. Contextually speaking, villancicos would normally have been integrated in the Office of Matins, or perhaps at Mass on high feast days – particularly Christmas or Epiphany, when five or more were sung, and also on the feast of the Immaculate Conception. This tradition prevailed in the Lisbon royal chapel during the time of King John IV following its cultivation in the chapel of the Dukes of Braganza in Vila Viçosa, and continued until the reign of King John V, when they were banned from the royal chapel (1716).<sup>2</sup>

The first volume of Matta's edition has fourteen items, some of which are dated to Christmas during the years 1647-9, while the second volume has twenty items, ending with the only piece of Latin sacred music, a setting of the *Te Deum* for double choir: it was in fact traditional to conclude sets of villancicos for Matins with a *Te Deum* on high church feasts. A large proportion of the villancicos in Matta's editions are likewise scored for large forces in double-choir arrangements, while others call for smaller combinations of voices in ensemble as well as sections for solo voices, all accompanied by continuo. The works are extremely imaginatively conceived. One may highlight the remarkable series of 'vilancicos negros' that frequently mimic the dialects and rhythms of African or Latin American native music, besides imitating speech patterns. These include 'Sã qui turo zente pleta' for double choir, and the Christmas villancico, dated 1648, 'Ola hau, quien está ahy?', which is trilingual – Castilian, pseudo-African and Portuguese. These types of settings were also popular in Spain, having first been composed in the later sixteenth century for the royal chapel of Philip II, and then becoming a regular feature of important Spanish cathedrals throughout the Baroque period.

Although all the music is anonymous, the villancicos in this Coimbra manuscript are clearly representative of traditions of this genre, especially locally at the Augustinian monastery of Santa Cruz in about the middle of the seventeenth century. Matta gives some information about the monks' musical training and the variety of instruments played there mid century, with reference to Ernesto Gonçalves de Pinho's important study on music at Santa Cruz in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>3</sup> However, a little more background and historical information about the context of these pieces, music making and composition at the monastery would have been a very welcome addition to the introductory pages. For example, from the point of view of compositional

<sup>2</sup> There is a growing literature on the Iberian villancico before the eighteenth century. See, for example, Álvaro TORRENTE, 'The Sacred Villancico in Early Modern Spain: Issues of Form, Genre and Function', *Journal of the Institute of Romance Studies*, 8 (2000), pp. 55-77; and Rui Cabral LOPES, 'Religiosity, Power and Aspects of Social Representation in the Villancicos of the Portuguese Royal Chapel', in *Devotional Music in the Iberian World, 1450-1800: The Villancico and Related Contexts*, edited by Tess Knighton and Álvaro Torrente (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007), pp. 199-217.

<sup>3</sup> Ernesto Gonçalves de PINHO, *Santa Cruz de Coimbra: Centro de actividade musical nos séculos XVI e XVII* (Lisbon, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1981).

origin, new villancicos were traditionally requested of a choirmaster in anticipation for their integration in liturgical offices on important festal occasions. Unfortunately, the name of the chapelmaster at Santa Cruz in the mid-to late 1640s is not known; but it is of some interest that the dated works in this collection coincide with the period of the Santa Cruz composer Dom Pedro de Esperança († 1660), whose Christmas Responsories—which have become popular ‘repertory’ pieces for modern-day ensembles—were likely to have been composed at around the same period as many of the villancicos in this edition. Besides works for Christmas and Epiphany, this particular manuscript includes settings intended for the monastery’s patron, Saint Augustine, Saint Anne, and the Coimbra Queen-Saint Clara. In addition to Pinho’s study, there is a range of literature that would also be useful to the interested reader and user of these editions. These include editions of Portuguese villancicos such as Manuel Carlos de Brito’s edition of other seventeenth-century villancicos from the monastery of Santa Cruz in Coimbra.<sup>4</sup>

There are just a few minor points of criticism to make about the musical editions themselves. As the manuscript is fragmentary in places, it was necessary to make certain editorial decisions and suggestions for the realization of the music, including providing a *continuo* part or *guião* in places and supplying missing notes. Criteria for making these editions are generally given in the prefatory material of each volume. However, but without labouring the issue, I did find a few curious decisions regarding the application of *ficta* and cautionary accidentals in a system that employs placing these both (and more conventionally) above the staff and next to the note(s) concerned within the staff, using both square and round brackets, besides other inconsistencies. With reference to a few pieces in ‘minor modes’, final chords in this edition are sometimes lacking in expected (editorial) *tierces*. Conversely, accidentals found in the original manuscript are sometimes curiously deleted in the modern score, instances of which may contravene then contemporary performance practice. Further, the preface does not mention that editorial major thirds to be included in the continuo realizations are placed in square brackets *beneath* the staff. Performers using these books may wish to revisit some of these issues in the individual pieces.

All in all it is gratifying to see more of this music coming out in print, making repertoires of unknown Portuguese music readily available to scholars and performing ensembles. For that alone, this edition may be seen as an extremely important contribution and is thoroughly to be recommended. Some of these villancicos in Matta’s edition have already featured in performances

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<sup>4</sup> Manuel Carlos de BRITO, (ed.), *Vilancicos do século XVII do Mosteiro de Santa Cruz de Coimbra*, Portugaliae Musica, A 43 (Lisbon, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1983). Other useful bibliography includes: Manuel Carlos de BRITO, ‘As origens e a evolução do vilancico religioso até 1700’, in *Estudos de história da música em Portugal* (Lisbon, Editorial Estampa, 1989); and Robert STEVENSON, (pref., ed.), *Vilancicos portugueses*, Portugaliae Musica, 29 (Lisbon, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian 1976).

and recordings by several vocal ensembles, including the *Coro Gulbenkian*, directed by Matta, *Vozes Alfonsinas*, directed by Manuel Pedro Ferreira, and other ensembles. Outstanding among these pieces is the double-choir Christmas villancico ‘Sã qui turo zente pleta’, which has also been popularly performed internationally by such as the King’s Singers. Jorge Matta is well known as a director of performances of Portuguese music from the early modern period both in Portugal and in festivals abroad, and this field of research represents his specialist area.

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