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ANONYMOUS COMPOSERS, AGUSTÍN DE ECHEVERRÍA (DIED 1792), JOSÉ LIDÓN (1748–1821), FÉLIX MÁXIMO LÓPEZ (1742–1821), BARTOLOMEO LUSTRINI (FLOURISHED 1760)

TESOROS DE ARÁNZAZU, VOLUME 1: ARIAS CON ÓRGANO OBLIGADO

Elena López Jáuregui (soprano) / Norberto Brogгинi (organ)

Verso, VRS 2077, 2009; one disc, 79 minutes

Scholars interested in Iberian music in the eighteenth century inevitably have to face a common burden: they study works that they very rarely have the opportunity to listen to. In the majority of cases, including works written by prominent composers of the period, neither an edition nor a recording is available. And this brings about further difficulties, in terms of carrying out a proper evaluation of the aesthetic or artistic value of most of the pieces, while also impeding natural comparisons with other contemporary composing traditions. This circumstance not only makes it impossible to introduce this repertory to concert halls, but also puts off other scholars and music lovers from becoming interested in this music. From this perspective the disc under review – which features a selection of arias with organ obbligato, whose sources come from the music archive of the Aránzazu Monastery in the Basque Country – is more than welcome. (It must also be mentioned that recording labels such as Verso (<<http://www.verso.es/>>) are making great efforts to change this situation; of its impressive catalogue of almost one hundred recordings, most focus on Spanish music from the sixteenth to the twenty-first centuries.)

It was more than thirty years ago that the particular richness of this musical archive was brought to light by Jon Bagüés, when he published his *Catálogo del antiguo archivo musical del santuario de Aránzazu* (Guipúzcoa: Caja de Ahorros Provincial de Guipúzcoa, 1979). The wealth of this collection corresponds to the prolific nature of the musical chapel (*capilla de música*) that was supported by this monastery; this was one of the most active musical institutions in the Basque Country and possibly the most musically qualified establishment amongst Spanish Franciscan monasteries. The archive of Aránzazu is particularly rich in eighteenth-century materials.

Since the publication of Bagüés's catalogue Aránzazu has often been cited as an outstanding example of an institution that in spite of being small and peripheral nevertheless preserves an extended collection of diverse works. As might be expected, sacred works in Latin and Spanish composed by friars linked to the monastery are abundant. One of these friars was Fray Agustín de Echevarría, a Franciscan composer who acted as *maestro de capilla* at Aránzazu during the second half of the eighteenth century. Two of the arias recorded here are composed by Echevarría, but more than eighty other pieces by him remain unpublished in the archive. It is unsurprising to find here many sacred works by other composers, some Franciscan, all destined for use in the liturgical services that took place at the institution. But it may seem somewhat startling to come across a handful of profane compositions, including Italian arias and instrumental pieces, in this monastery's collection. This circumstance, less infrequent than conventional histories of music have tended to show, is particularly revelatory in the case of Aránzazu, as it points towards a certain activity outside the institution's walls and at the margins of religious services. As a similar variety of works is preserved in musical archives of other institutions located in relatively small communities (such as Jaca, Astorga or Vilanova i la Geltrú, for instance), it must be assumed that the boundaries between the sacred and the profane were less rigid than has been traditionally perceived by musicologists.

Yet all the works recorded here were, in principle, created to be performed as part of liturgical services (most probably the mass). The nine arias for soprano and organ obbligato, all dedicated to the Blessed Sacrament, were presumably performed at the Offertory, one of the mass sections that more freely admitted non-Latin compositions as well as instrumental works. These arias, with Spanish texts, represent the final stage of a long, well-established practice in the Iberian world of performing music in the vernacular during special feasts. The *villancico*, which was declining by the time these arias were composed, is the most conspicuous example of this tradition. Furthermore, these arias of Aránzazu encapsulate both the influence



of operatic style in certain vocal genres intended for the church and the reduction of an orchestral accompaniment into an organ part. This 'limitation' reflects the scant resources available in small places (even though the personnel of the musical chapel of Aránzazu reached up to twenty members at particular moments of its history) as well as the abilities of musicians to make the most of their resources.

Some listeners might at first perceive that the level of reverberation exceeds the usual average for current recordings. The fact that the recording was made in a church in the Basque village of Ataun using an organ dating back to 1761 is undoubtedly an important factor, with direct consequences for the final result. Advocates of historically informed performance would rightly be satisfied with the sound, though the recording technicians could perhaps have minimized the reverberation slightly without losing the flavour of this performance in a historical locality. In general terms, Elena López Jáuregui tackles all the works with considerable vocal proficiency and a velvet timbre, achieving good results that are obscured only in occasional coloratura passages, in which greater vocal clarity would have improved the performance (listen, for instance, to the aria *De Hombre y Dios la perfección* by Agustín Echevarría, track 3).

In spite of the title of the CD, no fewer than seven works recorded here are for organ solo. Contrary to the criteria employed in the selection of arias – all of them presumably composed by local musicians, as far as one can tell, considering the great number of unattributed (anonymous) works – some organ pieces are by well-known composers who were active far away from Aránzazu, such as José Lidón and Félix Máximo López, who worked as organists at the Royal Chapel in Madrid. Yet Norberto Brogginí's performance is based on manuscripts held at Aránzazu, which is certainly relevant in historical terms for getting a feeling of what sort of repertoires and composers could shape the musical life of a Spanish monastery that was distant from the main cities. The organ used for the recording is obviously Spanish-built, which implies the possibility of registers that are characteristic of the rich Iberian organ tradition, such as the *trompetería horizontal*. Brogginí combines different registers with sensitivity, exploiting a wide variety of colours. Some listeners, however, might find certain passages performed with a touch that is too heavy or with a lack of fluidity, as occurs in the anonymous Sonata en 5º tono (track 4).

The occasional drawbacks mentioned above do not spoil what in general terms must be regarded as a performance that is more than meritorious, using grace and talent to 'improve' works that do not always exhibit the finest skills in composition. And that is not an irrelevant point. Poorly performed works or badly chosen compositions have ruined similar recording projects in the past. This CD is presented as 'volume 1' of the series 'Treasures from Aránzazu', suggesting that either the musicians or the label have recordings of other works from this peculiar archive in mind. If this is indeed the case, it will certainly enrich our knowledge of musical life in certain communities of eighteenth-century Spain that may seem small in size, but which are representative of broader musical trends and patterns in historical terms.

MIGUEL ÁNGEL MARÍN

