



## RECORDINGS

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IGNACIO JERUSALEM (1707–1769), SANTIAGO BILLONI (c1700–c1763)

*AL COMBATE: REDISCOVERED GALANT MUSIC FROM EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY MEXICO*

Eleanor Ranney-Mendoza (soprano), Elda Peralta (mezzo-soprano), Alexander Edgemon (countertenor), Sandro Naglia (tenor), Vince Wallace (bass) / Chicago Arts Orchestra / Javier José Mendoza  
Navona NV5902, 2013; one disc, 67 minutes

It is not often that one encounters a recording that contributes so fundamentally to our whole sense of historical imagination. There are certainly discs that expose the listener to new perspectives on performance practices and to different ways of engaging with particular musical repertoires. However, it is rare to listen to new sounds that expand our understanding of the activity of composers and performers from a much-discussed historical context and period. Studies of early-modern Hispanic culture have had a strong presence in musicology within the last five years – including transcriptions of new music – and they have made us rethink the connection that existed between Europe and the colonial American world as far as musical practices are concerned. The present recording, then, is just such an illuminating example, filling a void in current scholarship on eighteenth-century New Spanish music.

Much has been written about Ignacio Jerusalem (whose works, along with Santiago Billoni's, are heavily featured on this compact disc) in recent scholarship concerning music in New Spain. A parvenu in the *capilla* at the cathedral in Mexico City, his compositional skills in music of the so-called *estilo moderno* (modern style) have captured the attention of scholars, among other reasons because of their departure from renaissance-style contrapuntal practices at such a historically important ecclesiastical centre. In part, this is why Jerusalem experienced so much political tension during his tenure as *maestro de capilla*, since his music was considered – at least by some contemporaries – to be insufficiently erudite. Throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, counterpoint was considered an essential theoretical basis for the academic study of music; its study defined a field of knowledge that could be used to demonstrate the intellectual credentials of an educated *maestro de capilla*. One could argue that such an antiquated way of thinking was aesthetically at odds with new directions in musical practice at the time, but equally one must not forget that even the young Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was criticized at the academy of music in Bologna for insufficient knowledge of counterpoint. For Jerusalem, these aesthetic differences put him at a disadvantage mainly because people were not sure whether he could compose the large-scale works (such as masses and vespers services) that were needed in a cathedral. Craig Russell began to redress this misconception with his transcription of Jerusalem's monumental matins service for the feast of the virgin of Guadalupe (recorded by Chanticleer on Teldec 3984–21829–2 (1998)). Now Drew Edward Davies's edition of the cantata *Al Combate* made for this recording urges us to revisit the existing scholarship on this composer, as well as to rethink his place in the landscape of New Spanish musical activity.

The composers represented on this recording are two of the most prolific of their period. Music by Billoni is drawn from Davies's substantial recent study of the composer's music from the cathedral of Durango, *Santiago Billoni: Complete Works* (Recent Researches in the Music of the Baroque Era 170 (Middleton: A-R Editions, 2011), reviewed by David R. M. Irving in *Eighteenth-Century Music* 11/1 (2014), 125–127). At the moment we have more to learn about Billoni's music than that of Jerusalem, which continues to resurface in different repositories. Although a comprehensive edition of Jerusalem's entire oeuvre may still be some way off, extant pieces by him tell us more about New Spanish musical culture in the *Siglo de las Luces* (century of Enlightenment) than does Billoni's music, whose works would benefit from more historical research. Be that as it may, the Italian influence on the music of this period more generally is undeniable – and not surprising either – which raises questions about the transformations that occurred in a society where religious culture played a central role. Until now sacred works by Jerusalem have



received particular attention, and one can only wonder if this is because, in the historical imagination, he remains perceived as a cathedral chapel master. There is no inaccuracy here; after all, Jerusalem fought hard to be respected as such, given that people did not see him as *maestro de capilla* material because of his lack of ‘erudition’.

This was a corporate position, none the less, through which Jerusalem held important privileges, such as the exclusive rights to perform at functions celebrated at the Royal University. The musical ode *Al Combate* (by far the longest work on the recording and also one of the largest surviving musical works produced in New Spain) is a highly important work from this milieu, and its presence on this recording uncovers a previously unknown dimension of the composer’s output. With the arrival of new intellectual and aesthetic trends from Enlightenment Europe, notions of musicianship (that is, what it meant to know music, and to be a musician) changed drastically. Counterpoint, a theoretical measure of musical knowledge according to quasi-mathematical criteria, became far less relevant as a sign of erudition, which was itself an important social attribute and an indicator of status. Rather, a taste for grace and refinement characterized an emerging elite of wealthy miners and merchants, who considered poetry the locus of such new sensibility. This brought new attention to poetic forms from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which when set to Italian-infused music (with stylistic traits from galant music and late baroque opera) introduced a more modern voice. If poetry reflected a new kind of erudition, the stylistic traits of music in the *estilo moderno* offered a new grammar to facilitate the understanding of what musical knowledge was, not least because of the way in which these traits reinvigorated old poetic forms.

*Al Combate* was an example of this phenomenon, composed on the text of the winning entry from a poetry competition held at the Royal University. The competition was arranged to celebrate the coronation of King Charles III of Spain in 1759, and as cathedral chapel master Jerusalem was commissioned to write music for the poem. While the event was a showcase for enlightened New Spanish approaches to academic erudition, the cantata was a clear statement of modern musical style that reaffirmed Jerusalem’s place as *maestro de capilla* of the most important cathedral in Spanish America. Other pieces featured in the recording – like the Symphony in G major – add more depth to this notion and invite further inquiry into the place of instrumental music in New Spanish culture, and the contexts in which it was fostered. It is well known, for example, that notable personalities in Mexico City held soirees and evening entertainments that featured music, but no information has been found to tell us about the nature of these events. One such individual was Miguel de Berrio y Zaldívar, Marqués de Jaral de Berrio and Conde de San Mateo Valparaíso, who is known to have been a music-lover and who held this type of entertainment in his palace. The extant inventory of his music library shows, among other things, concertos and symphonies, and one cannot help but wonder whether Jerusalem’s Symphony ever made it to Berrio y Zaldívar’s music room; after all, the marqués owned some of the chapel master’s other music.

Alongside the recent work of scholars such as Vince Wallace, Alexander Edgemon, Eleanor Ranney-Mendoza and Sandro Naglia, this recording has the potential to transform our current understanding of eighteenth-century New Spanish musical life. The music of Santiago Billoni is not featured as prominently as Jerusalem’s (only two short pieces in comparison to a full ode, two vocal pieces and a symphony by the other Italian) but is no less exquisite. Javier José Mendoza’s baton balances the orchestra quite nicely, while Elda Peralta and Sandro Naglia deliver melodic lines with simplicity and beauty. However, it must be said that the highlight of the recording is countertenor Alexander Edgemon, whose performance in the ode is articulate and effortless. All in all, the disc is outstanding among available recordings of New Spanish music, and one can only hope for more work along these lines by the Chicago Arts Orchestra.

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