

Beatriz Montes

## Francisco J. García Fajer, *lo Spagnoletto*

Francisco J. García Fajer (*b* Nalda, La Rioja, 1730; *d* Zaragoza, 1809) is certainly one of the 18th-century Spanish composers who was overdue the attention of a whole conference. In the early 1980s, Juan José Carreras (University of Zaragoza)

had argued for the need to study the person and works of García (*La música en las catedrales durante el siglo XVIII: Francisco J. García 'El Españoleto'*, Zaragoza, 1983). Although many Spanish music histories mention García, little is known about how his work was received by his contemporaries, how his influence extended to Latin America or how he influenced a long line of students who disseminated his ideas throughout the Iberian peninsula.

The congress 'En torno a García Fajer y su obra musical', celebrated in the Universidad de La Rioja (19–20 April 2007),<sup>1</sup> took up Carreras's proposal and provided new perspectives on García's work such as his intense period of activity in Italy, or the response to his works in the Spanish colonies in Latin America. The meeting, organized by Miguel Ángel Marín and Teresa Cascudo (Departamento de Ciencias Humanas, Universidad de La Rioja) was arranged into five themed sessions designed to offer an almost complete overview of the subject. The sessions covered a general introduction to the musical and historiographic issues common to 18th-century music, text and dramaturgy in García's theatre music, genre and performance of the sacred repertory as well as its impact, the diffusion and reception of his work in both Europe and Latin America, and several biographical and stylistic aspects of García's work.

The opening session, with Carreras and the organizers of the congress, compared and contrasted various aspects of general and Spanish musical classicism. Marín's paper argued that Haydn was not only an important influence on García's works, but necessary for any serious study of 18th-century Spanish music history. Haydn, as a model for the study of 18th-century Spanish music, was one of the main themes of the conference, both because of the evidence from primary sources (Haydn's music was frequently copied in many of the Spanish cathedrals) and the clear stylistic influence on Spanish music of the period.

The study of text and dramaturgy offered a synthetic view of García's most representative stage works. The *intermezzi*, such as *La Pupilla* and *La finta schiava*, were the focus of two papers,<sup>2</sup> by Gian Giacomo Stiffoni (Zaragoza/Venice) and Paolo V. Montanari (University of Bologna). The dramatic and musical settings of García's *opera seria* *Pompeo Magno in Armenia* were examined by José Máximo Leza (University of Salamanca). Although this opera was performed in Madrid and Logroño in 2003, it had not previously been edited, and an edition is now available (*Música Hispana*, no.70, Instituto Complutense de Ciencias Musicales). This edition was launched during a round table discussion attended by Emilio Casares (Universidad Complutense of Madrid) and the composer

and musicologist Tomás Garrido, who made the edition, among others. A recent recording of the *Maestros de Capilla de Santander* (Lachrimae LCD 9714 DDD) performed by The Universidad de Cantabria's Camerata Coral and Amsterdam's Camerata, conducted by Lynne Kurzeknabe, was also presented at the same time. Some excerpts of the CD (*Misa en Si bemol mayor* by Juan Antonio García Carrasquedo (1734–1812)) were played. García Carrasquedo was García's nephew and pupil, and also the first chapelmaster of Santander Cathedral. The presentation of the CD was subsequently complemented by Kurzeknabe's paper on the life and works of García's nephew.

The religious and liturgical context, particularly devotions such as that to Saint Dominguito de Val, to whom García and his contemporaries dedicated oratorios and *villancicos*, afforded perspective on the influence of local devotional traditions. In García's music, sacred genres were often intermingled with a variety of diverse interests. This point was made clear in the paper by Pablo L. Rodríguez (Universidad de La Rioja) on the reception of the *misa cantada* in Spain, and reinforced by the interesting explanation of the substitution of *villancicos* by *responsorios* presented by Álvaro Torrente (Universidad Complutense of Madrid).

The contributions of Alejandro Vera (Pontifical Catholic University of Chile) and Javier Marín López (University of Granada) formed a bridge between Spain and Latin America, and documented that García's music was found in Santiago de Chile Cathedral and in some Mexican archives. Both papers bore witness to the international dissemination of García's works during the 19th century.

As a fitting conclusion to a successful meeting, the *Camerata del Prado* performed a concert of García's works in Logroño Cathedral conducted by Tomás Garrido, which included *Las siete palabras de Cristo en la Cruz* and excerpts from the oratorio *Tobia* (both overtures and some of the arias such as 'Lo sguardo è Piendi', 'Sposa quest'alma sviene') and from *La finta schiava*. It was most stimulating to listen to the music discussed in some of the papers. The performance issues and possibilities of this music merit further research and discussion.

The conference resulted in two strong conclusions as regards García's work, conclusions that are relevant to much Spanish Baroque and Classical music in general. First, it is possible to study these works in a meaningful way even while we await the recuperation of many additional works surviving in the archives. The recent discovery of García's *intermezzo La finta schiava* enriched but did not substantially modify previous research. Second, while historical and historiographic reflection remain vitally necessary and relevant, as does the editing and per-

formance of these works, musical analysis has been somewhat neglected and offers a promising avenue for future research. While some passages of García's music are elementary harmony exercises, of scant musical interest, other works are very intriguing from an analytical viewpoint. One question frequently arose, especially in the minds of young scholars and graduate students who attended the meeting: does García's music really work and how does it work? More musical examples, more demonstrations on the role of voice and melody, harmonic principles and liturgical influences need to be compared against the ubiquitous model of Haydn, but also against Pergolesi, Jomelli and others. This research can begin while we await García's *opera omnia*.

Fortunately, the continuation of this event is not far away: in 2009 the 200th anniversary of García's death will be commemorated by a monograph dedicated to this excellent composer, edited by the organizers of the 2007 conference.

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