

## Vilancicos of Santa Cruz de Coimbra

The Monastery of Santa Cruz de Coimbra was the main residence of the Regular Augustinian Canons and one of the chief Portuguese musical centres in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was a self-sufficient musical community, which resorted to its own members as singers, instrument players, music masters, composers and instrument makers. During the five-year period of noviciate, each monk studied music and organ, yet all those who played other instruments, which could be used during the religious service, did so whenever it was required.

Several vilancicos of Santa Cruz de Coimbra are *negros*, musical pieces which represent a splendid example of the cultural exchange at the time of the Portuguese discoveries and evangelization. In several languages – Portuguese, Spanish, Creole or even others, which appear in dialogue, either mixed or with exoticisms, these pieces are usually centred on the Christmas theme, the birth of the “Baby”. They are frequently divided in several parts, soli and tutti, which either overlap one another or dialogue, sometimes with a quite large dimension and an elaborate structure, illustrating the evolution which led to the cantata-vilancico by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Although there are no descriptions of the way these vilancicos were performed, it is very likely that such performance included staging and dancing, in addition, of course, to the use of varied instruments.

*Olá hau, quién está ahy?* is a “Dialogue between a Spaniard, a Negro and a Portuguese”, who get cross with one another by claiming for each one of them the nationality of the Baby Jesus (the arguments include the skin colour of the Baby). It is the Negro of Angola (“plétio d’Angola”) who wants everyone to be friends (“toros zente quer ver amigas”) and who urges the other two to stop fighting (“no ayas brigas”). They all end up singing and celebrating. This is a two-choir piece, four voices per choir, several soloists and instrument accompaniment.

*Qual fue la causa señor?* is also a two-choir piece, four voices per choir, one soloist and instrument accompaniment, alternating soli and tutti. The composing method is quite harmonic and vertical, using echo effects between the two choirs. The text is about the sorrows and misfortunes of life and love, pleading the Lord that the “final journey” bring forth “couzas de risi e de graça” (laughter and joy).

*En un portal derribado* is once again about the birth of the Baby Jesus (“esta noche entre pajas parió la Reina”), and, compared to other pieces of a similar nature, shows an exceptional poetic quality: “un clavel ha nacido de una asucena” (a carnation has sprung from a lily), “en Dezembro se ha buuelto la primavera” (Spring has come forth in December). In front of the crib, a bold Portuguese (“muito valente”) wearing large boots (“com muy grandes botas”) drives everyone away because “o menino que chora hé de Portugal” (the baby who cries was born in Portugal). However, a gallant Italian (“un gallardo italiano”) bursts forth and starts singing in Italian in an eccentric way (“cantar bizarro”), presenting the Baby to the people of his country, and referring to Him as “lo belo macarrone”. A group of dancing Negros (“una dança de negros”) enters next, who gaily celebrate, dance, sing and play instruments (“flauta”, “pito”, “tamborilito”) for Our Lord (“noss’amo”) was born. This piece is for soli

and tutti by turns, two choirs, four voices each, composed in a very lively fashion, with some imitation, yet the dialogues between choirs prevail.

*Olá zente que aqui samo* narrates that the prophecy was fulfilled in the land of white people "terra de zente branca", and that the Lady of the Rosary gave birth in Bethlehem, laid in straw ("siolo do Rosaro pare en Beren nuns pahya"). Everyone brings presents from their lands ("de cosa de nosso terra" -"mantega", "ova da xuque es coida huns batatia, mandioca mas ynhamé", "tabaquió"), kissing the feet and hands of the girl and queen ("bezamo as pé da minina" and "nas mão da siolo Raihia"), in a great celebration, dancing and playing instruments, for today the glories of heaven ("ablimo as glória da Ceo") were given to the Negros of Guine and S.Tome ("hoze a pleto zente"). This two- choir piece alternates soli and tutti, each choir has four voices, and the composition is very lively, with some imitation, vertical dialogues in chords between the two choirs, frequently in cries of joy ("hé, hé, hé").

*Olá plimo Bacião*, for nine voices divided by two choirs (5+4), and instrumental bass, with several soli and tutti, is very dynamically written, constantly alternating and overlapping double and triple time rhythm, with a very lively dialogue between groups, usually both choirs, each with different elements, for example one of them describing the action, melodically and horizontally, and the other with festive cries, in synchronic chords. "Plimo Bacião" and other Negros from Guine and S.Tome are called upon to see Baby Jesus ("Qu'esse nozo Deuzo é"), everyone wants to kiss his hands and feet, but above all, everyone who can sing, play instruments and dance want a great celebration.