



Literary Evidence and Ceremonial Use of the Villancico at San Lorenzo del Escorial through the Late Seventeenth Century

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THE ROYAL Monastery of San Lorenzo del Escorial was begun in 1563, built by King Philip II as a token of appreciation for the Spanish victory against the French at St. Quentin, on the day of San Lorenzo (10 August) in 1557. It rapidly became one of the most important Spanish monasteries and was associated closely with the crown. Monarchs were often in residence at the palace there, and it was also the burial place of Spanish royalty. As was the case at most Spanish religious institutions, by the seventeenth century villancicos often were sung for matins services on Christmas and Epiphany, Corpus Christi, important saints' days, and occasional Marian feasts. Very few villancicos survive in manuscript at the Escorial from before about 1630,¹ but the institution's status as a royal monastery means that services took place before the Bourbon kings and their family. Court chroniclers and monks described these services and royal visits in various publications, providing evidence of villancicos and related genres at the Escorial during its first century.

¹For a detailed approach to the seventeenth century villancico at the Escorial, see my "The Villancico Repertory at San Lorenzo El Real del Escorial, c. 1630–c. 1715" (Ph.D. dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1986), or "Los villancicos del siglo XVII en el Monasterio del Escorial," pp. 169–234 in *La Música en el Monasterio del Escorial: Actas del Simposium (1/4-IX-1992)*, Colección del Instituto Escorialense de Investigaciones Históricas y Artísticas, Nº 2 (San Lorenzo de El Escorial: Estudios Superiores del Escorial, 1992).

The use of villancicos at the Escorial followed a pattern that had been set at other Jeronymite monasteries. Federico Sopena Ibañez has described the order's rich musical heritage, noting that villancicos were included in their traditions.² The Jeronymite Hernando de Talavera, the first bishop of Granada following the reconquest, ordered that vernacular music for worship be used at Granada Cathedral at the beginning of the sixteenth century.³ The use of vernacular religious music at the Jeronymite monastery at Guadalupe, another royal institution, is noted for the year 1561 in a sixteenth-century manuscript entitled *Costumbres antiguas*. This description of worship practices at Guadalupe includes the following: "...in Christmas matins, between the lessons, sometimes sing some devout songs [*chanzonetas*] or motets in polyphony to Our Lord or Our Lady..." (The term *chanzoneta* refers to works with texts in the vernacular.) Added in the margin next to this instruction is the following: "Friday, 5 December 1561. It was determined in chapter villancicos will be

²P. Federico Sopena Ibañez, "La Música en el Monasterio de El Escorial: De Felipe II a la ilustración," *El Escorial 1563–1963* (Madrid: Ediciones Patrimonio Nacional, 1963), 664.

³See José López-Calo, *Siglo XVII*, vol. 3 of *Historia de la música española*, ed. Pablo López de Osaba (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1983), 114, and José López-Calo, *La música en la catedral de Granada en el siglo XVI* (Granada: Fundación Rodríguez Acosta, 1963), 1: 255–56.



sung at all nine lessons of said matins, as have been sung for some years now."⁴ When Philip II ordered the establishment of a new Jeronymite monastery at the Escorial, monks came from other communities to populate it, meaning that at least some would have brought with them the tradition of singing villancicos.

The first mention of villancicos performed at the Escorial has been discussed by Marta Santaolalla de Muñoz.⁵ Three poems celebrating the Spanish victory over the Turks at Lepanto in 1571 appear in a manuscript for which Santaolalla provides no identification, but she notes: "Surely these verses were sung at the Escorial Christmas night of the same year 1571."⁶ The three poems include an *Ensalada de la Victoria*, *Villancico portugués*, and *Villancico muy devoto a Nuestra Señora*. Short refrains entitled *villancicos* appear in the *ensalada*. The *ensalada* is dedicated to the birth of Jesus Christ, as would be expected for a Christmas work, but the text is a mixture of verses praising the Christian victory over the "heathens" and Jesus's birth. The two poems called *villancicos* are of typical Christmas sentiment and in the expected form of the period, with *estribillos* and *coplas*.

Another use of works at the Escorial presumably like villancicos appears in the *Memorias* of Fray Juan de San Jerónimo for the year 1575. On 26 June, the feast of Santa Ana, the prior ordered the entire community to process together out of the monastery to a forge with an image of the Virgin. There they held a service. The procession included a planned performance of vernacular religious music: "They passed with this up to the door of the monastery... and here for the second time the same singers began to sing some pure and joyful *villanesca* that seemed to have been composed for that place..."⁷ The use of the term *villanesca* here almost certainly means works

with vernacular texts similar to villancicos, a usage found in the title of Francisco Guerrero's *Canciones y villanesca espirituales*.⁸

Philip II endowed his royal monastery with a large number of relics, four boxes of which arrived at the Escorial in 1597. The occasion was greeted with great celebration that included the use of vernacular poetry and music. The monks and students produced an outpouring of Spanish poetry and posted it on walls and columns throughout the monastery. Philip II rewarded such devotion by asking that the poetry be collected and read to him, a special gesture by a king who disliked poetry.⁹ The music for this festival was described in the following manner: "A very solemn procession was performed with many lights... with many dances, motets, villancicos and beautiful ideas, all raised to the male and female saints' relics with a great amount of polyphony, with very elegant voices and such deliberateness that it truly was a very live portrait of paradise..."¹⁰ The dances might have been performed by choirboys, a frequent

hasta la puerta del monasterio... y allí comenzaron la segunda vez a cantar *los dichos cantores unas villanesca honestas y regocijadas que parecía se habían hecho para aquel lugar...*" (Rubio's italics.)

⁸ For more information on Guerrero's use of the term *villanesca*, see my *Towards a History of the Spanish Villancico* (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 1997), 26.

⁹ The passage describing the use of poetry for the celebration was written by Sigüenza. It is quoted in José Sierra, "La Música en El Escorial según el P. José de Sigüenza," *Revista de musicología* 6 (1983): 510–11. Sigüenza writes: "On the doors, arches, doorjambes and columns, as well as on the portico of the main church, in the chapel of the Site, there was a great deal of poetry and many genres of verses: sonnets and songs, couplets in Castilian, epigrams of great devotion and witticisms in Latin, and very amorous lyric verses, all by some fathers of the convent as well as the two monks' schools and seminary, and other persons... His Majesty wished that they all be gathered and read to him slowly, which was no small favor, because the King felt little fondness for poetry..." ("En las puertas, arcos, jambas, y pilastras, así del pórtico como de la iglesia mayor, en la capilla del Sitio, *había mucha poesía y muchos géneros de versos, sonetos, y canciones, coplas castellanas, epigramas de mucha devoción y sal, en lengua latina, y amorosísimos versos líricos*, así de algunos padres del convento como de los dos colegios de los religiosos y seminario y de otras personas... Su Magestad, quiso que las enviasen todas y se las leyesen despacio, que no fue poco, porque no se le sentió mucha afición a la poesía...") (Sierra's italics.)

¹⁰ Rubio, "La capilla..." 68. Sigüenza writes: "Hízose una muy solemne procesión con muchas luces... con muchas danzas, motetes, villancicos y lindos conceptos, todos en alabanza de los santos y santas reliquias *con mucho canto de órgano*, con

⁴ José López-Calo, "La Música en el rito y en la órden jerónimianos," *Studia hieronymiana* 1 (1973): 135. ("...en los maitines de Navidad, entre las lecciones, se dicen algunas veces algunas chanzonetas o motetes devotos de canto de órgano, de nuestro Señor o de nuestra Señora." The marginal note reads as follows: "Viernes 5 de diciembre de 1561, se determinó en capítulo que se cantase villancicos a todas las nueve lecciones destes maitines, como algunos años antes se habían cantado.")

⁵ Marta Santaolalla de Muñoz, "Las Fiestas y su música en el Monasterio de San Lorenzo El Real," *El Escorial 1563–1963* (Madrid: Ediciones Patrimonio Nacional, 1963), 674–76.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 675. ("De seguro estos versos fueron cantados en El Escorial la noche de Navidad de aquel año de 1571.")

⁷ Samuel Rubio, "La capilla de música del Monasterio de El Escorial," *La Ciudad de Dios* 163 (1951): 74. ("Pasaron con éste

part of villancico performances throughout Spain during Corpus Christi and a practice for which there is ample documentation at the Escorial starting in the sixteenth century.¹¹

Philip II's successors did not use the monastery nearly as frequently as a royal residence, but special occasions, often theatrical, did occur during their reigns. Theater, both sacred and secular, was an important pastime in Philip III's reign and became the all-consuming passion at the court of Philip IV.¹² The influence of poetic texts and music used in dramatic presentations was very important in the history of the villancico, the texts for which showed more influence from the popular theater than any other source, especially in the seventeenth century. Sacred dramas were presented at the Escorial as early as 1569, and they continued to be performed throughout the last three decades of the century.¹³ Court masques, in which Philip II showed little interest, were revived during his son's reign; one was performed at the Escorial in March, 1604.¹⁴ *Autos sacramentales* commonly were performed for the court on Corpus Christi, a common custom throughout Spain. Villancicos were a frequent part of *autos*. In 1609 and 1613 *autos* were produced while the court was in residence at the Escorial.¹⁵ During the reign of Philip IV, plays were frequently performed at the Escorial, usually in the palace, but some were also done at the king's orders in the monastery for the monks'

Such performances would have served to keep the members of the community abreast of the latest in popular texts and music, an influence that might have appeared in their own villancico texts.

Two festivals of particular importance that occurred at the Escorial during Philip IV's reign included the greeting of Mariana of Austria in 1649 and the monastery's centennial celebration in 1663. Both relate to the villancico's history and composition of vernacular texts at the monastery. In 1649, Philip IV made Mariana of Austria his second wife. The king arrived at the Escorial on 1 October with his daughter, and then left for Navalcarnero one week later to meet Mariana. They returned to the monastery-palace the following day, and remained in residence there until 3 November, when they went to Madrid. The monks recorded the visit in detail in a 1649 print entitled *Pompa festiva y real aparato*.¹⁶ It was during this festival that, at the order of the king, plays were performed for the monks by the Prado company of Madrid.¹⁸ The source includes information on the royal activities at the monastery, including separate tours of the building and grounds by the princess and queen and the king's numerous hunting trips.¹⁹ For events of particular significance to the monastic community, the monks wrote verses that appear in the print. The occasions that caused the greatest outpourings of poetry were the arrival of Mariana at the Escorial and her viewing of the relics at various altars

gallardas voces y tan acordadas que verdaderamente era un retrato muy al vivo del paraíso..." (Rubio's italics).

¹¹ See Santaolalla and Sierra.

¹² The Spanish court theater was extremely active throughout the century, a story which has been discussed in detail in N. D. Shergold's *A History of the Spanish Stage from Medieval Times until the End of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967). The best available study of Spanish theater music in the seventeenth century is Louise K. Stein's *Songs of Mortals, Dialogues of the Gods: Music and Theater in Seventeenth-Century Spain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

¹³ The history of dramatic presentations at the Escorial has been told briefly by Gregorio Andrés in "El Martirio de San Lorenzo (comedia representada en El Escorial en el año 1590)," *Monasterio de San Lorenzo El Real* (El Escorial, 1964), 363-68.

¹⁴ Shergold, 248.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 432. The *autos sacramentales* traditionally performed on Corpus Christi were allegorical, religious, and dramatic presentations usually performed on carts which were towed to various locations in a procession. Shergold deals with the *autos* in Chapter IV of *A History...*, and in more detail with J. E. Varey in their *Los autos sacramentales en Madrid en la época de Calderón, 1637-1681. Estudio y documentos* (Madrid, 1961).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 304.

¹⁷ *Pompa festiva y real aparato, que dispuso alegre y executó gozoso el Real Monasterio de S. Lorenzo, Octava Marauilla de Mundo. En el recibimiento de la Serenissima Reyna nuestra Señora Doña Mariana de Austria.* (Madrid: Imprenta Real, 1649).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 26r.

¹⁹ After a detailed description of several days of the visit, the following summary is offered in *Ibid.*, f. 25r: "Of the fourteen days following this one until that of the Apostles St. Simon and Jude, the ways Their Majesties enjoyed themselves will not be related in order to abbreviate this account, and since nothing in particular happened which should be noted. Because, the King our Lord took everyone hunting, and the Queen and Her Highness [the princess] went to the ash grove, the chestnut grove, the orchards and gardens, and to other diversions of this type." ("De los catorze días siguientes desde éste, hasta él de los Apóstoles S. Simón, y Judas, no se dize en que los gastaron sus Magestades, por abreuvar esta relación, y por no auer cosa en particular que aduertir; porque el Rey nuestro Señor los empleó todos en la caza; y la Reyna, y su Alteza, y en la Fresneda, ya en la Castañar, ya en las huertas, y jardines; y en otros diuertimientos deste género.")



in the basilica.²⁰ The writing of poetry to honor royalty had been a common practice for centuries, and the Escorial monks obviously considered it a significant activity. Villancicos required texts, and clearly a number of the monks wrote poetry. Probably a number of the extant villancicos in the Escorial archive include texts written by monastery residents.

The chronicler in *Pompa festiva y real aparato* at times mentions what music sounded during the royal family's stay at the monastery. For our purposes, the most important such description is of the music that helped to celebrate the king's and queen's entrance into the monastery on 9 October 1649:²¹

While Their Majesties stood in wonder at the beauty and fine proportion of the church, the chapel sang the verse, *Te ergo quaesumus*. And then the prior (who was at the main altar with his assistants), turned to face Their Majesties, intoned the verses and prayers as ordered by the Roman Pontificate, to which responded the chapel, community, and four organs, causing admiration in all. Following this music was more for three choirs, who expertly sang this villancico, dedicated to Their Majesties' good arrival at this their Royal House.

The text of this villancico appears in the print. It is in a rather unusual form, beginning with five five-line stanzas that surely served as coplas; a seven-line responsión follows, perhaps sung once after all five coplas had been performed. After the responsión are five more four-line stanzas under the title *Endechas*, a common poetic form. The text of the coplas compares the visiting royalty with celestial bodies and mythological figures, and the responsión speaks of how these beings rejoice in the king's and queen's arrival. In the endechas, the poets praise the couple as defenders of the church. Following the performance, the king and queen retired to the palace.

²⁰ The poems written in honor of the royal couple's arrival at the monastery appear on ff. 15r to 23r. The genres represented include *sonetos*, *octavas*, *décimas*, *romances*, all in Spanish, and *motets* in Latin or Spanish. The poetry written to honor the queen's adoration of the Forma Consagrada and other relics appears on ff. 27r to 29r.

²¹ *Ibid.*, f. 14r. ("Entre tanto que a sus Magestades tenía suspensos la hermosura, y buena disposición de la Iglesia, cantó la capilla el Verso, Te ergo quaesumus; y luego el Prior (que con los acompañados estaua ya en el Altar mayor) buelto el rostro a sus Magestades, entonó los versos, y oraciones, que manda el Pontifical Romano, a que respondieron la Capilla, la Comunidad, y los quatro órganos, que a todos causó admiración. Siguióse a esta música otra a tres coros, que cantaron con destreza este Villancico, dando a sus Magestades, la bien venida a ésta su Real Casa.")

Other events in which monks and royalty participated included the observance of an annual tradition started by Philip II: a meal for the king and the monks on 28 October, the feast of Apostles St. Simon and St. Jude.²² Also described is the king's and queen's attendance at the services for All Saints' Day.²³ The king was not present on other occasions when the community customarily performed villancicos, but the ceremonial use of a villancico during the visit is a confirmation of the genre's importance at the monastery during the period.

A spectacular festival occurred at the Escorial between 29 August and 6 September 1663: the celebration of the centennial of its founding. The event was described in sumptuous detail by Fray Luis de Santa María in his *Octava sagradamente culta*. The king was at the Escorial for the festivities, which included worship services and dramatic presentations. The demands upon the monastery's musical chapel were huge, including preparation of music for eight different solemn masses and the same number of vespers, plus miscellaneous other services.²⁴ This meant the composition of eight new polyphonic masses and eight psalms (for vespers) and an unknown number of villancicos. Santa María lists multiple villancico performances for vespers on 29 August and mass, vespers, and compline on 30 August. Villancicos by Fray Manuel del Valle were performed during the watch on September 6. Valle set the following texts: *Oy Templo a Templo compiten; Hostia sacra, único enigma; Las siete, que Maravillas; and Equívocos los poetas*. Another villancico by del Valle was also performed that day, *A la batalla de agudos ingenios*, with harp accompaniment provided by Fray Juan Durango. Santa María extravagantly praises Durango's musicianship, one of the principal composers of Escorial villancicos.²⁵ The chronicle mentions trumpet and drum

²² *Ibid.*, ff. 25r–26v.

²³ *Ibid.*, ff. 29v–30r.

²⁴ A summary of the musical activities during the week as described by Fray Luis de Santa María is provided in Rubio, "La capilla . . ." 84–85. The discussion of the music for the week that follows was derived from this source. Santa María's description of the solemn mass on August 30 is available in Santaolalla, 681.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 85. The phrase from Santa María reads: "To the accompaniment of the harp (which is played with such skill by Father Fray Juan de Durango, who merits the printing of his name even in more durable lamination . . ." ("Al acompañamiento del arpa, que la toca con tanta destreza el Padre Fray Juan

playing at several points during the festival.²⁶ The villancico *A la batalla de agudos ingenios* is on a battle theme, and it is possible that trumpets and drums would have participated in its performance. Unfortunately, none of the music to del Valle's villancicos survives; there remain in the archive no villancicos that were especially written for the centennial celebration. The secular parts of the festival included dances, plays by Calderón and other authors, and a mock bullfight.²⁷

In 1665 Philip IV died and was succeeded by his son, Charles II, a weak-minded and frail king destined to be the last of the Hapsburgs in Spain. The majority of the villancicos extant at the Escorial from the seventeenth century were written during the reign of Charles II. The ceremonial villancicos written during the reign of Charles II, either mentioned by chroniclers or surviving today, were for use in events related to the disastrous fire which destroyed a great deal of the monastery's interior in 1671.²⁸ The monks celebrated the extinguishing of the fire with a procession similar to those of Corpus Christi in which villancicos were customarily performed. The works for this occasion had texts with references to the fire, and were accompanied by instruments.²⁹ The reconstruction of the monastery occurred over the next five years. In the autumn of 1676, the royal court visited the monastery for the first time since the fire, an event celebrated with a forty-day festival of hunting, bullfights, and gondola rides on area lakes. A villancico ascribed to Juan Durango, written for the initial entrance of the royal family into the monastery during that festival, survives at the Valladolid Cathedral.³⁰ The work, entitled *Vengan norabuena*, does not appear in the Escorial archive. It is for four voices (SSAT) and harp continuo with the top soprano often appearing in a solo capacity. The estribillo is in

quadruple meter. The dominant texture is soprano solo answered by the other three voices as a group, but there are also contrapuntal passages. The estribillo's text emphasizes the good news of these royal stars pleasing the lights and heavens in this glorious procession. The coplas are for solo soprano and harp continuo. They are in triple meter with hemiola. The text of the first copla comments on the great happiness after profound sadness. The references are not specific to the fire, but they are clear in context.

As previously noted, many of the texts of extant villancicos at the Escorial might have been written by the resident monks. This seems especially true among those by Juan Durango, active at the Escorial from 1650 until his death in 1696.³¹ There are thirteen signed villancicos by Durango in the Escorial archive written for Corpus Christi and the saints' days of San Lorenzo and San Jerónimo.³² Texts for Christmas and Epiphany circulated widely around Spain, but that did not tend to be the case for the feasts for which Durango wrote villancicos.³³ There do not appear to be concordances for Durango's texts in other sources, making it all the more likely that an Escorial monk penned these texts. One Corpus Christi villancico, *Ah del famoso Escorial*, pays lavish tribute to the monastery and its Corpus processions.³⁴ The second copla includes the phrase "octava maravilla"; the Escorial's residents routinely referred to their home as the "eighth wonder of the world." Durango's setting of this text is for two choirs (SSAT, SATB) and harp continuo. The estribillo is for full sources, but the coplas are for various soloists with harp. Unlike some of Durango's villancicos, the music of *Ah del famoso Escorial* is fairly routine, but the text suggests the esteem that the Escorial monks had for their home. The year in which Durango wrote the villancico is unknown.

Estribillo

Ah del famoso Escorial,
Donde amante y disfrazado,
El sol esfera ha tomado
Que en la tierra no hay igual.

de Durango, que merece se imprima su nombre aún en más durables láminas...")

²⁶ Santaolalla, 682.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 681–83.

²⁸ This fire has been described in detail in several sources on the Escorial's history. A consideration of the fire's effect on the arts in the monastery is available in Gregorio de Andrés, *El incendio del Monasterio de El Escorial del año 1671: Sus consecuencias en las artes y las letras* (Madrid: Artes Gráficas Municipales, 1976).

²⁹ Santaolalla, 680.

³⁰ This villancico is in the Valladolid Cathedral archive under the call number 68/41. On the cover appears the following identification: "A la entrada de sus magestades en el Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo después de la quema. Año de 1676."

³¹ For more information on Durango, see Paul R. Laird: "Durango, Juan de," *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 22 September 2005), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

³² See *Ibid.* or Rubio and Sierra.

³³ For information on the dissemination of villancico texts, see my *Towards a History*, 179–84.

³⁴ *Ah del famoso Escorial* is call number 28/7 in the Escorial archive.



Maravilla celestial
 Goza del sol el favor.
 Pues en la tierra mayor,
 De nieve y jazmín vestido,
 Siendo encendido el clavel
 A lo público ha salido
 En cuerpo, hermoso y real.
 Ah del famoso Escorial,
 Cántenle villancicos sonoros,
 Pues va en procession lucida,
 Convidando al pan del cielo.
 Dando con noble desvelo,
 Sí, con vida,
 Dando con noble desvelo,
 Convidando, convidando,
 Vida, vida.

Coplas

Muévase en la procession
 Entre cándidas cortinas,
 El sol que si amor le encubre,
 Lince lance le divisa.

Ande el zodíaco ilustre
 Desta octava maravilla,
 Donde en su obsequio gustosos,
 Los signos se multiplican.

Sean floridos altares,
 Las zonas por donde gira,
 Dando en las mesas el alma
 Mil regalos y delicias.

De vuelta al círculo grande
 Desde el cielo en quien se mira,
 Venerado de coronas,
 Y aplaudido de capillas.

The preceding discussion has demonstrated the regard in which the Escorial monks held the villancico. During the first century and a third of the monastery's history, villancicos were written and performed for events in which royalty participated. In other special events, villancicos helped enhance worship. Only two of the musical works discussed above survive, but they provide concrete evidence of Durango's villancicos written for ceremonial purposes, and one includes characteristic praise for the monastery. The pieces were performed throughout Spain to add to the religious fervor of a particularly festive day in the liturgical calendar; for the same reason they could also add to the excitement surrounding a ceremonial event.