

## Jesuits with a British twist

*On its brief tour of Andalucía, the Ripieno Choir performed a noteworthy selection of Renaissance polyphonic music (Juan José Roldán, El Correo, 26 October 2019)*

Although it was British choral ensembles that spearheaded the growth in interest in European polyphony, particularly the finest Spanish music of that period, their interpretations soon became outdated when judged by the standards of music historians; mainly French and Spanish choirs then took on the duty of applying a more sober and restrained feel to the genre. In Spain we are very used to listening to this type of music in a rigid way which is aesthetically more dispassionate and academic, so we expected this traditional and experienced choir to deliver a rendition in the purest and most orthodox British tradition, but it was in fact **very exotic**.

The programme was based on the Jesuit theme of *Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam* (To the greater glory of God), and it was a surprise to see the high average age of the choir, which was founded just after the Second World War. This seemed to be reflected in the voices, which were initially slightly hesitant and out of tune but just a few minutes later they proved to be **perfectly sophisticated and subtly nuanced**, delivering an impressive performance of this sumptuous repertoire. The programme ranged across cities such as Córdoba and Granada, and was kind enough to pay special attention to the three greats of Spanish polyphony: Tomás Luís de Victoria from Madrid and Cristóbal de Morales and Francisco Guerrero from Seville, who are deservedly the most famous Renaissance composers of Spain, and by extension the whole world. From the outset the nineteen voices (one woman fewer in the second half) emphasised the music's mystical character, and the highlight was an outstanding four-part *Improperia* whose writing and execution were of particular quality. With Morales, regarded as the first internationally famous Spanish composer, what stood out was the vocal clarity, and with Guerrero it was the great melodic beauty of the five-part *Ave Virgo Sanctissima* which drew the programme to a close.

**The Ripieno Choir excelled in its rich interplay of harmony and counterpoint**, and the singers were pleasingly arranged onstage, from higher voices to lower and from left to right, with the sopranos and altos in reverse order from the usual. They created **an unequivocal feeling of magic and mystery** which, together with the use of emotion and sentiment as well as accuracy and mysticism, meant that we enjoyed an unique experience, enhanced by the splendid acoustics of the Espacio Turina. Among the most outstanding pieces were an *Adoramus Te, Christe* by Handl which was **ethereal and enchanting**, and a **stunning** Agnus Dei from the Mass *O Quam Gloriosum* by Victoria, as well as some pleasant pieces by Tallis and Gibbons in the English vernacular. The concert was preceded by some moving words by Arnold W Collado, president of Juventudes Musicales de Sevilla, who organised the event in memory of Emilio Galán, president of the Seville Association of Friends of the Opera, who was taken from us at the start of this year; this institution has always regarded him as what he was, namely a great friend and partner.

*Translation by Mark Stollery*