



**Collegium Musicum “Fernando Silva-Morvan” and Camerata Barroca de Caracas. Monumenta Vol. II. La Música Colonial Venezolana. CD FD398200945.**

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When Pedro Ramón Palacios y Sojo (1739-1799), better known as ‘Padre Sojo,’ returned from Europe to Venezuela with the Papal Bull issued by Clement XIV on 4 December 1769 with instructions to found the San Felipe Neri Oratory in Caracas, he did not know that this institution would ultimately allow the emergence of a school of composers and instrumentalists in Venezuela known as the *Escuela de Chacao*. As Juan Bautista Plaza reminded us, this institution educated a group of composers and instrumentalists between 1780 and 1830 (*Temas de música colonial venezolana* (Caracas: Fundación Vicente Emilio Sojo, 1990, p. 127). For this cultural enterprise Padre Sojo relied on the composer Juan Manuel Olivares (1760-1797) in order to support teaching at the Oratory. Since then, J. M. Olivares has been an iconic figure with a wide reception in Venezuelan art music historiography. For example, in *Ensayos sobre el Arte en Venezuela* in 1883, Ramón de la Plaza wrote about Olivares’ role as a music pedagogue and affirmed:

*Maestro* Juan Manuel Olivares, director of the Padre Sojo’s Academy, naturally made the best of the studies undertaken within, and trained this distinguished group of artists that founded in their works the sincere temperament for the spirit of a national music. As instructor, Olivares reached a deep knowledge of art that he transmitted skillfully to his disciples [. . .]<sup>1</sup>

Before Ramón de la Plaza’s publication, José Antonio Díaz published in 1861 his general history book *El agricultor venezolano*, in which he reported from an oral source that the only musician with music knowledge then available in Caracas was J. M. Olivares. ‘Padre Sojo’ entrusted him with teaching some youths he had gathered together for this purpose, and brought them to his hacienda in Chacao, where Olivares instructed them. However, what José Antonio Díaz meant was that Olivares was one outstanding musician among his colleagues, who included other fine composers in Caracas.

José Antonio Calcaño pointed out in *La Ciudad y su Música* (Caracas: Fundarte, 1958, p. 81) that “[Olivares’] compositions reveal to us that he possessed a solid musical training. Of high interest is his handling of the harmony, abundant, sometimes, in modulations as well as in instrumentation and form.” Calcaño was of the opinion that as a composer Olivares’ “*Salve* and *Stabat Mater* are two of the best works from our Colonial music repertoire because of the elevation and clarity of his musical

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ideas as well as his technical mediums.” Alberto Calzavara mentioned in *Historia de la Música en Venezuela* (Caracas: Fundación Pampero, 1987, p. 88) that Olivares provided the music for the services at the Cathedral of Caracas after the death of its Chapel Master, Alejandro Carreño (1726-1791). Juan Bautista Plaza in *Temas de Música Colonial Venezolana* (p. 127) opined that “there is something in Olivares’s music which does not derive from foreign sources, though it does not even belong completely to him. We can define this ‘something’ as the intuitive expression of the colonial soul. . . .” And the musicologist David Coifman in the series *Monumenta de la Música Colonial Venezolana* dedicates a subchapter to J. M. Olivares in his book *De Obispos, Reyes, Santos y Señas en la Historia de la Capilla Musical de Venezuela (1532-1804)*.

The second volume of *Monumenta de la Música Colonial Venezolana* is the product of the collaboration between musicologist David Coifman, conductor Isabel Palacios and the ensembles Collegium Musicum Fernando Silva-Morvan and Camerata Barroca de Caracas, and is dedicated to four works by mulatto composer Juan Manuel Olivares. Before presenting a biographical sketch of Olivares, David Coifman discusses the music for the Venezuelan Ecclesiastical Grand Orchestra from 1791 to 1799.

The *Stabat Mater* and the *Lamentatio Prima in Sabbato Sancto* were acquired in 1791 by the Caracas Cathedral and were still in the possession in 1806 when Chapel Master José Cayetano Carreño (1774-1836) –brother of the well-known writer Simón Rodríguez (1769-1854)-catalogued them. They comprise the sole example extant today of works composed by Olivares for the exclusive use of the Caracas Cathedral. The classical style prevalent in these scores reflects the instrumental density that at the time characterized the forces at the Cathedral’s disposal, which also allowed for the inclusion of supernumerary musicians, then known as “foreign”, as required by the solemnity of the liturgical occasion at hand, thereby and since 1778 comprising a “Grand Orchestra” as Olivares himself described it in the receipts he issued to the Cathedral. As for the *Vespers* (ca. 1791) and the *Salve Regina* (ca.1793), none was acquired by the Cathedral during the composer’s lifetime, nor included in Carreño’s inventory... This album presents the recording, in all its solemnity, of a work representative of this itinerant and first “Grand Orchestra” ever assembled in Venezuela for ecclesiastical purposes, between 1791 and 1796 conducted by Olivares himself, the first time ever a mulatto stood at their front” (p. 13).

The *Stabat Mater* (1791) for four voices (SATB), two flutes, two horns, two violins, viola and continuo is the first work in this recording. It starts with an instrumental *ritornello* introduction that includes the *suspiratio* technique as a rhetorical figure, tonal mixture and register changes. *Lamentatio Prima in Sabbato Sancto* (1791) for tenor solo (T), two flutes, two horns, two violins, viola and continuo is a melancholic work in which the treatment of the voice is starkly simple in order to capture the affects and declamatory style of the *Lamentations of Jeremiah*, and their expression of sorrow and pain. David Coifman observes that Olivares “loads his phrases with the upbeats and *ritardandos* typical of the classical ‘sensitive style’ ” (p. 18).

*Primae Vesperae in Nativitate Domini Nostri Jesu Christi* (ca. 1791) is the longest piece of music on the CD, and it is a solemn work that embodies the celebration of the birth of Jesus within the Catholic tradition inherited from Spain.

*Salve Regina* (ca. 1793) for three voices (SAT), two horns, two violins, viola and continuo alternates movements in *a tutti* (*Salve Regina*, *Eia ero* and *O Clemens*) with solo movements (*Ad te clamamus* and *Et Iesum*) in which Olivares employs resources such as chromaticism, circle of fifths, *colla parte*, and *Da capo* form to develop his music narrative in this work.

This recording brings a representative sample of the work of an outstanding Latin-American composer from the Colonial period. Impressive is the deep level of understanding that David Coifman displays in his reconstruction of these works, as well as his knowledge of their style, history, and liturgical context. In general, the Collegium Musicum “Fernando Silva-Morvan” and Camerata Barroca de Caracas led by Isabel Palacios, engage in a thoroughly connecting performance that grasps and brings breath to the Olivares music. One criticism I could make is the flagging intensity of some high *tessitura* notes in the strings. Conversely, I can only express my enthusiasm with this distinguished project!

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