



**Benedicto Sáenz *Libera Me*:  
Occidentalisms in Latin America Nineteenth–Century Sacred Music**

**ANDRÉS AMADO PINEDA**  
University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

**Abstract**

This article uses concepts of Occidentalism and the musical analysis of a funerary responsory by nineteenth-century Guatemalan composer Benedicto Sáenz (1807-1857) to examine possible reasons why music from nineteenth-century Latin America remains relatively neglected in the region and beyond, unlike the better explored repertoires from colonial times and from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Based on Latin American postcolonial notions of Occidentalism as the construction of the Western Hemisphere by Western Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and analysis of Sáenz's responsory *Libera Me* within the context of changing political, social, and musical trends in nineteenth-century Guatemala, I argue that nineteenth-century music in Latin America reflects local struggles to engage with two competing models of European modernity: the “first modernity” of the Spanish colonial empire and the “second modernity” of the Enlightenment, Liberalism, and the French Revolution. Responding to influences from both modernities, *Libera Me* expresses local European habits that do not fit Orientalist narratives of Latin American Otherness or nationalist narratives of local distinctiveness which have influenced the musical historiography in the region.

**Keywords:** occidentalism, nineteenth century, Guatemala, Benedicto Sáenz, postcolonialism, sacred music

**Resumen**

El presente artículo propone conceptos de occidentalismo y un análisis musical del responsorio fúnebre del compositor decimonónico guatemalteco Benedicto Sáenz (1807-1857), para examinar posibles motivos por los que la música decimonónica en Latinoamérica permanece relativamente poco estudiada en comparación con los repertorios del período colonial y de los siglos XX y XXI. Con base en las nociones de pensadores poscoloniales latinoamericanos que conciben el occidentalismo como la construcción del hemisferio occidental desde la Europa Occidental en los siglos XVI y XVII, y en el análisis del responsorio de Sáenz *Libera Me* dentro del contexto de los cambios políticos, sociales, y musicales en la Guatemala del siglo XIX, argumento que la música decimonónica en Latinoamérica refleja enfrentamientos locales a dos modelos europeos de modernidad en competencia: la “primera modernidad” del imperio colonial español y la “segunda modernidad” de la ilustración, el liberalismo, y la revolución francesa. Ante las influencias de ambas modernidades, *Libera Me* expresa hábitos europeos que no encajan dentro de las narrativas orientalistas de la otredad latinoamericana, ni en las narrativas nacionalistas de distintividad local, las cuales han influido en la historiografía de la música de la región.

**Palabras clave:** occidentalismo, siglo XIX, Guatemala, Benedicto Sáenz, poscolonialismo, música sacra

In their introduction to the nineteenth-century volume of *Historia de la música en España e Hispanoamérica*, Consuelo Carredano and Victoria Eli Rodríguez wrote on the state of musicological research on nineteenth-century Hispanic America:

Music history on the nineteenth century Spanish-speaking Americas encounters many obstacles; the most important is the limited bibliography, especially of international studies of the [American] continent's music. Another grave problem is the absence of analytical interpretations in the few and scattered historical monographs on the music of the different countries in our Americas, despite the many facts they contain.<sup>1</sup>

While more research on the subject has emerged since their assessment, it continues to resonate a decade later. Walter Clark adds to these reasons for historiographical lacunae that Napoleonic wars in Europe and independence wars in the Americas, along with the concomitant political and economic instability surrounding them, also hindered the preservation of musical sources from the period.<sup>2</sup>

The circumstances described by these authors fit broader historical processes that postcolonial theorist Michel Rolf Trouillot calls “silencing the past.” According to Trouillot, these processes intervene at four “moments” in the construction of history: “the moment of fact creation (the making of the source); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance).”<sup>3</sup> By conceiving the relative neglect of nineteenth-century music in Latin America as part of postcolonial silencing processes that go beyond (but include) the evident lack of extant sources, available resources for researchers, and general interest on the topic, I join scholars who have likewise applied critical theories and analyses to explain gaps in nineteenth-century music in general and in other periods of Latin American music history. These researchers have explored the reorientation of the nineteenth-century European musical discourse, in which music was reconceived less in terms of its socially functional dimensions and more as a transcendent work of art.<sup>4</sup> In the Americas, these ideas, coupled with exoticist and nationalist predispositions, framed the research of local repertoires.<sup>5</sup>

In this article, I focus on the historiographical silences surrounding Western-European musical traditions in nineteenth-century Latin America, the so-called “classical” or “academic” traditions. While excellent studies on vernacular musical developments during this period exist,<sup>6</sup> the Western

---

<sup>1</sup> Carredano and Eli Rodríguez, *Historia de la música en España e Hispanoamérica: La música en Hispanoamérica en el siglo XIX*, 21. Translation mine.

<sup>2</sup> Clark, in *Nineteenth-Century Choral Music*, 449–71.

<sup>3</sup> Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 26. Original emphasis.

<sup>4</sup> Bohlman, “On the Unremarkable in Music,” *19th-Century Music* 16, no. 2 (1992): 205. Gelbart, *The Invention of “Folk Music” and “Art Music.”*

<sup>5</sup> Davies, “Finding ‘Local Content’ in the Music of New Spain,” *Early Music America* 19, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 64,60-62.

<sup>6</sup> Paredes, “The Corrido on the Border”; and Madrid and Moore, “Danzón as a Performance Complex.”

tradition has yet to attract the kind of attention given to the previous colonial repertoires, to the subsequent nationalist composers of the twentieth century, or to contemporary experimental composers. To this end, I analyze a relatively obscure work, the funerary responsory *Libera Me* by Benedicto Sáenz (1807-1857) and explore the extents to which it conforms and departs from the Eurocentric expectations that directly or indirectly ascribe “value” to the work. The piece does not feature clear African or Indigenous idioms that would endow it with “local” qualities. Its liturgical content goes against the grain of the growing nineteenth-century trends of Liberalism and secularism. Its liturgical form undermines its performance as a work of “art.” The responsory even shows part-writing unorthodoxies that may raise questions about the composer’s mastery of European techniques. Nevertheless, *Libera Me* displays remarkable motivic unity, a thoughtful incorporation of late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century topics, intense chromaticism aligned with Romantic sensibilities, and harmonic parallelisms that may suggest stylistic innovation. Even while following European conventions, the piece also belongs to a rich tradition of Iberian and Latin American funerary music.

Considering these interesting musical features, one wonders why so few scholars have studied Sáenz’s work.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, other composers throughout the Americas who have likewise engaged creatively with and within European traditions at other historical moments seem to interest researchers and performers in ways that nineteenth century repertoires have not. To help explain the specific historical “silencing” of nineteenth-century Latin American music, I turn to postcolonial notions of Occidentalism.

Considering Occidentalism both as the construction of the West outside the West (indicative of “the second modernity” of France and Britain), and as the construction of the Western Hemisphere by Western Europe (indicative of the “first modernity” of the Spanish colonial empire), I argue that music in nineteenth-century Latin America expresses regional struggles to generate identities based on two competing models of European modernity; not concretely fitting either but taking elements from both, this repertoire therefore remains at the margins of the historical narratives ensuing from these modernities. After discussing relationships between modernity and Occidentalism and then situating Benedicto Sáenz’s *Libera Me* within the historical and musical developments affecting the Guatemala City cathedral in the nineteenth century, I show how the piece’s form, style, and musical topics express the struggles Latin American republics faced as they transitioned from their colonial identities (the first modernity of the Spanish Empire), into the post-independent modernity of the nineteenth century.

### **Which West? Occidentalisms and the Americas**

Said’s *Orientalism* not only profoundly shaped academic interpretations of Western European representations of its Others, it also invited investigations into the processes of essentialization outside Western Europe. Even though Said himself did not envision a symmetrical analytical field to Orientalism called Occidentalism, anthropologists and cultural scholars nevertheless began using the

---

<sup>7</sup> Although he has not specifically studied this responsory, Igor de Gandarias is a notable exception. Gandarias, *La obra musical de Benedicto Sáenz (1807 - 1857)*.

term to explore “essentialized simplifications of the West,” particularly in Eastern contexts.<sup>8</sup> Some of its proponents go as far as to argue that Said’s Orientalism necessarily implies the concept.<sup>9</sup> While in some respects similar to Orientalism, Occidentalism does not denote equivalent power dynamics in Eastern constructions of the West; rather, Occidentalism addresses various phenomena outside the West that reference it, ranging from hateful caricatures of the West to the adoption and propagation of Western forms of cultural production and media (so-called “Westernization”). In its broadest sense, Occidentalism acknowledges that conceiving the West as a homogenous unit is a constructivist strategy.<sup>10</sup>

If Occidentalism constitutes the construction of an essentialized Western Europe and the adoption of its cultural practices, the concept may apply to nineteenth-century Latin America, a region whose intelligentsia looked to Western Europe as a model in philosophy, politics, art, and music.<sup>11</sup> For example, José Manuel Izquierdo König explains why so few Latin American composers wrote operas despite the widespread regional popularity of the genre.

Opera, inside opera houses, was an extension and a projection of ‘Europe,’ and thus it not only had to be *felt as*, but also *be* ‘European.’ Opera was accepted by many as a sign of Europeanness and its associated values: modernity, progress, cosmopolitanism, a certain sense of Occidentalism, and the commodification of a model of the imagined West.<sup>12</sup>

Still, nineteenth-century attitudes that conceived opera as an “extension” and “projection” of Europe in Latin America derived from the long historical precedent of Spanish colonization, in which local cultural elites did not simply *aspire* to become European but *were* European in every respect except birthplace. In this sense, notions of Occidentalism that denote the construction of a foreign West, thereby implying an insider/outsider dichotomy, fail to account for the complex social stratification of Spanish colonial societies and its later repercussions.

Latin American thinkers have addressed distinctive colonial and postcolonial conditions in the Americas through a different Occidentalism: if Orientalism refers to the Western-European construction of the East, Occidentalism would refer to the Western-European construction of the Western Hemisphere. In this respect, Occidentalism predates Orientalism; it begins in the wake of

<sup>8</sup> Typhaine Leservot, “Occidentalism: Rewriting the West in Marjane Satrapi’s *Persépolis*,” *French Forum* 36, no. 1 (2011): 115–30, <https://doi.org/10.1353/frf.2011.0004>.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Massad, “Orientalism as Occidentalism,” *History of the Present* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 83–94, <https://doi.org/10.5406/historypresent.5.1.0083>.

<sup>10</sup> Jukka Jouhki and Henna-Riikka Pennanen, “The Imagined West: Exploring Occidentalism,” *Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* 41, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 1–10; Rie Karatsu, “Cultural Absorption of Ballroom Dancing in Japan,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 36, no. 3 (Winter 2003): 416–40.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Turino, “Nationalism and Latin American Music: Selected Case Studies and Theoretical Considerations,” *Latin American Music Review / Revista de Música Latinoamericana* 24, no. 2 (Autumn - Winter 2003): 169–209, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3598738>.

<sup>12</sup> José Manuel Izquierdo König, “Rossinian Opera in Translation: José Bernardo Alzedo’s Church Music in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Chile,” *The Opera Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (December 15, 2019): 251–75, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oq/kbaa008>. Original emphasis.

Columbus's voyages and advances the notions of modernity from Spain, arguably the first global colonial empire. In this sense Orientalism corresponds to a "second modernity" forged by British and French empires in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>13</sup>

In this paradigm, Occidentalism is not simply an earlier version of Orientalism, it also qualitatively differs from it. Instead of considering foreign cultures as primitive antecedents of Western civilization (as in the case of Orientalism), in the "first modernity" (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), Europeans viewed the Western Hemisphere as an extension of Europe; not as its past, but as its future, justified by a Christian rationale. Prior to 1492, they had Christianized the Ancient Greek tripartite model of the earth—consisting of Europe, Africa, and Asia—to correspond with the Biblical myth tracing the origin of all living humans to Noah and his family, the sole survivors of a global flood. According to this worldview, Noah's sons Japheth, Shem, and Ham respectively populated Europe, Asia, and Africa, accounting for the world's total population. When stumbling upon a "new" (to them) continent already populated, the European post-diluvian narrative could no longer explain reality. Europeans wondered about the origins of indigenous peoples in the Western continent, even questioning if they were people at all. Eventually, Europeans settled on a notion of the New World that was not so much an exotic Other as it was an extension of Europe itself, and consequently, a space Europe could legitimate claim and colonize.<sup>14</sup>

This first Occidentalism had profound consequences in the Americas during the period of *la conquista*, the centuries of colonial rule that followed, and the post-independence period. Unlike French and British empires who sought to assert their superiority over the ostensibly primitive Orient through military conquests, in the case of Occidentalism, the Spanish goal extended beyond conquest; it consisted of the transformation of the Other's soul in the image of the European Self. Hence, the Western Hemisphere became not only a New World, but more specifically a new Europe, with a New Spain in it demanding its population shared the Spanish habitus.<sup>15</sup> In this context, sacred music fulfilled two important functions: first, to facilitate the inculcation of the European habitus among local populations undergoing processes of colonization, and second, to express the European habitus of the colonizers and the recently colonized peoples. This second function remains understudied and undertheorized in the literature on Latin American music.

Independent movements in the nineteenth century complicated local identities and their cultural expressions by accelerating trends that began in the eighteenth century. In the Spanish colonies, the ascension of the Bourbon dynasty to the throne of Spain and the spread of Enlightenment and Liberalism concomitantly growing with the aggressive French and British colonial expansions, gradually moved the locus of European identity from Spain to France, so by the time Napoleon invaded the Iberian peninsula, struggles for independence represented the choice

---

<sup>13</sup> Santiago Castro-Gómez, *La Poscolonialidad Explicada a Los Niños* (Editorial Universidad del Cauca, 2005), 42-49. This text summarizes the work of many Latin American postcolonial thinkers, including Walter Mignolo, Aníbal Quijano, Edmundo O'Gorman, Enrique Dussel, Darcy Ribeiro and others.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-57.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-64.

between two competing models of European modernity.<sup>16</sup> The military songs of the time show a growing predilection for French notions of modernity in the Spanish Americas. As French military songs proliferated in the New World, their meaning changed from pro-revolutionary into pro-independence. “La Carmagnole,” for example, became “La carmañola americana” around 1797. It continued to be performed in Caracas in 1811, where it later inspired the song “Canto de las sabanas de Barinas” in 1817.<sup>17</sup>

The struggle between the first and second modernities advanced by the independence movements continued throughout the rest of the century in the form of Conservative and Liberal confrontations over the future of the emerging republics. On one side, Liberals ostensibly embraced principles of Enlightenment and Classical Liberalism; on the other, Conservatives sought to govern through mechanisms and institutions established in colonial times. As one of the oldest, most prestigious, and most powerful colonial institutions, the Catholic Church found itself at the center of the political struggle between Liberals and Conservatives. Liberals viewed the Church as a relic of the old colonial system and sought to dismantle it through various “reforms.” On the other hand, Conservatives endeavored to protect and defend the Church and capitalized on its political influence. These divisions often lead to armed revolts and in some cases full-blown civil wars. Given that the influence, wealth, and prestige of the Church depended on which side triumphed, the proliferation or decline of sacred music in Latin America reflects to some extent which modernity—or which Occidentalism—predominates at different moments of this struggle.

### **Benedicto Sáenz’s *Libera Me* and Nineteenth-Century Central America**

I encountered the funerary responsory *Libera Me* by Benedicto Sáenz at the Museo Nacional de Arte Moderno Carlos Mérida in Guatemala City as a set of hand-written individual parts for voices and orchestra. The vocal parts in the museum’s collection feature narrow ranges in tessitura and dynamics, and no embellishments, suggesting they are choral rather than solo parts. The instrumental ensemble consists of first and second violins, viola, cello and bass (notated on the same part), two flutes, two clarinets in C, two bassoons, and two trumpets in D.<sup>18</sup> The instrumentation not only recalls Haydn’s late masses and contemporaneous responsories from the cathedral in Mexico

<sup>16</sup> Of course, I’m somewhat simplifying the model for the sake of conciseness. In terms of music, Italian and Germanic influences also played an important role the Western construction its Other during the second modernity. In the eighteenth century, Italian music advanced cultural expressions of the Enlightenment since *La Querelle des Bouffons* in 1750s France. Italian influence also propelled musical developments in Germanic and British cultures, as evidenced by the Mozart-Da Ponte opera collaborations in the late eighteenth century, for example.

<sup>17</sup> María Gembero Ustároz, “La Música En Hispanoamérica (1808-1914): Sonidos En Un Mundo En Vísperas de Su Independencia,” *Scherzo Editorial*, no. 231 (2008): 131–32.

<sup>18</sup> To my knowledge no published editions of this music are extant. Igor de Gandarias and Dieter Lehnhoff mention a *Libera Me* by Benedicto Sáenz Vallejo but each lists different instrumentations from each other and from the parts I consulted. Lehnhoff does not mention trumpets but includes horns. De Gandarias does not mention trumpets either but lists two ophicleides and two horns. Further research may determine if all three of us refer to the same piece. Igor de Gandarias, *Diccionario de La Música En Guatemala (Fase I: Área Académica)* (Guatemala City: Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, Dirección General de Investigación, Programa Universitario de Investigación (DIGI), Centro de Estudios Foklóricos (CEFOL), 2009); Lehnhoff, *Creación Musical En Guatemala*, 155. Carredano and Eli Rodríguez, eds., *Historia de la música*, 161.

City,<sup>19</sup> but also compares to other pieces written at the Guatemala City cathedral in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup>

The cover page reads *Responzo a 4 voces y orquesta* (responsory for four voices and orchestra) with the word *Liberame* (sic.) annotated above *responzo* (sic.) in parenthesis and different ink color, and the word *Pequeña* (small) similarly annotated above *orquesta*. Below, the name of the composer appears justified to the right margin: *Por Don Benedicto Saenz* (by Mr. Benedicto Saenz). Violinist and composer Valentín Lafuente seems to have authored the annotations, and perhaps copied and edited the parts, since his signature graces the page further down, in the same ink and handwriting as the annotations (Figure 1).<sup>21</sup> Even though the inscription attributes authorship to Benedicto Sáenz, it does not state whether it refers to Benedicto Sáenz Álvarez (1781-1831) or his son Benedicto Sáenz Vallejo (1807-1857), both of whom were musicians at the Guatemala City cathedral.<sup>22</sup> In any case, the piece aligns with trends of the first half of the century, and Lafuente's surviving parts suggest it may have even been performed well into the 1870s.

<sup>19</sup> For example, Sáenz's instrumentation somewhat exceeds that of the Nelson mass (Hob. XXII/11, 1798) and the Theresa Mass (Hob. XXII/12, 1801). However, *Libera Me* requires a slightly smaller orchestra than Haydn's *Paukenmesse* (Hob. XII/9, 1796) which calls for French horns and oboes, the *Creation mass* (Hob. XII/13, 1801) which despite not using flutes includes oboes and obbligato organ, and the *Wind Band Mass* (Hob. XII/14, 1802) that incorporates flute, double oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, and trumpets, in addition to the timpani, strings and *continuo*. In Mexico, Antonio de Juanas used his largest orchestration for the responsories of Christmas and the Assumption. In 1812, his Assumption responsory features obbligato organ, two violins, two oboes, two trumpets, two horns, timpani, and *continuo*. Dianne Marie Lehmann Goldman, "The Matins Responsory at Mexico City Cathedral, 1575-1815" (Ph.D., United States -- Illinois, Northwestern University, 2014), 322-25.

<sup>20</sup> Jesús Fernández de Padilla (1795-1845), José Escolástico Andrino (1816-1862), Vicente Sáenz (father to the elder Benedicto, 1756-1841), and Benedicto Sáenz Jr., all wrote responsories with similar instrumentations. Gandarias, *Diccionario*, passim.

<sup>21</sup> Lafuente remains a relatively unknown figure in Guatemalan music history. Although the *Diccionario de la Música en Guatemala* does not include an entry on him, it lists him among orchestral violinists active until 1877. Lehnhoff mentioned Lafuente as the composer of two late nineteenth-century masses. Gandarias, *Diccionario*, 108. Lehnhoff, *Creación Musical*, 155. Carredano and Eli Rodríguez, eds., *Historia de la música*, 132.

<sup>22</sup> To help establish the piece's authorship one might compare the responsory to other pieces by either composer. The only published editions available at the moment are five sacred pieces by Sáenz Vallejo edited by Igor de Gandarias. Stylistic comparisons to attribute authorship are beyond the scope of this article. Benedicto Sáenz and Igor de Gandarias, *La obra musical de Benedicto Sáenz (1807 - 1857)*, Colección música. (Ciudad de Guatemala: Editorial Cultura, Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, 2017).



Figure 1. Cover Page of *Libera Me*.

In colonial times, Guatemala City (in its various locations) served as an important administrative capital for territories that included much of present-day Central America and Southern Mexico. As such, the musical life of its cathedral thrived under the leadership of renowned Iberian chapel masters such as Pedro Bermúdez (1558-1605) and Gaspar Fernandes (1566-1629), and later local-born composers like Manuel José de Quirós (?-1765) and Rafael Antonio Castellanos (1725-1791). Throughout this period, the musical production of the cathedral helped express a European habitus which brought prestige to Guatemala City as an important colonial center.

While the political importance of the city and its relationship to Spain changed over the course of the nineteenth century, remarkably, the local production of sacred music enjoyed some continuity. Unlike their northern neighbors in Mexico, Central Americans did not fight a war of independence despite the rise of local independence movements and revolts. By and large, Central American political elites found themselves torn between desires for independence on the one hand, and longing for the stability that the established colonial order seemed to offer on the other, all while realizing the fragility of Spain's authority. When Mexico launched its war of independence in 1810, the Central American provinces still disagreed on a course of action. With the independence of Mexico finally recognized in 1821, Central America declared its own independence, but their regional unity disintegrated as some provinces joined the new Mexican Empire and others did not. After the

abdication of Agustín de Iturbide in 1823, Guatemala City regained prestige as a regional capital when the new federal republic, the United Provinces of Central America, came into existence.<sup>23</sup> Despite the Liberal orientation of the federation's first government, the Church retained many of its privileges, and the musical life of the cathedral continued uninterrupted under the leadership of the Sáenz family.<sup>24</sup>

Still, political divisions endured, leading to a civil war between Conservatives and Liberals that tore the Central American federation apart. The Conservative caudillo Rafael Carrera went on to rule Guatemala, now an independent country from 1840 to 1848, and again from 1851 until his death in 1865. All the while, Liberalism remained relatively latent until 1871, when through revolution, Liberals ceased power from Conservatives and controlled the government well into the twentieth century. Governing mostly through dictatorships, they enacted more drastic reforms than earlier Liberals. They curtailed the influence of the Church by instituting lay education, transferring Church functions to the civil government (such as keeping records of marriages, births, and deaths), and confiscating Church assets. In sum, although Guatemala City did not always function as a regional capital in the nineteenth century like it did in colonial times, the moderate approach to reforms by the first Liberal Central American governments, the Conservative rise to power in the mid-century, and the involvement of several generations of the Sáenz family in the musical life of the church, all ensured a degree of continuity for sacred music traditions at the Guatemala City cathedral until 1871.

Despite this general stability, the cathedral's musical practices and styles also show influences of the second modernity. First, Spanish social structures began to change during the course of the eighteenth century, with the leadership of the chapel passing from European to native-born musicians. Later, the appointment of Vicente Sáenz (1756-1841) as chapel master in 1805, marked another profound institutional change. Not only was he born in Guatemala, he was also of mixed race (*pardo*), which led the archbishop to ask the cathedral chapter to remove him as soon as a suitable replacement with "clean blood" could be found.<sup>25</sup> However, Sáenz remained chapel master until his death at age 85, suggesting that the social and political backdrops of independence and Liberalism made the racial requirements for the position less relevant.<sup>26</sup>

The second modernity also influenced musical styles and genres of sacred music. In the eighteenth century, Spanish churches stopped performing vernacular villancicos and replaced them

<sup>23</sup> With Chiapas remaining part of Mexico, the Central American provinces at the time included Guatemala (which then included Belize), Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica.

<sup>24</sup> The fact that the first Liberal governments in Central America allowed the Church to retain its privileges evidences that many Catholics held Liberal views. Throughout the Spanish Americas, members of the clergy and their congregations supported independence movements and Liberal military victories were celebrated with sacred music. Simón Bolívar had a *Te Deum* performed in his honor, and Agustín de Iturbide constituted an imperial chapel when he founded the Mexican Empire. Carredano and Eli Rodríguez, eds., *Historia de la música*, 26-7; 127, 131-2.

<sup>25</sup> Lehnhoff, *Creación musical*, 128-29.

<sup>26</sup> Race remained an important factor in many aspects of post-independence life in Guatemala, but paradigms of race progressively changed according to French and Anglo-American notions, as I show in my dissertation on twentieth-century popular music. Andres Amado Pineda, "The Fox Trot in a Nation of Cosmopolitans: Music and Race in Early Twentieth-Century Guatemala" (Ph.D. dissertation, Austin, TX, The University of Texas at Austin, 2013).

with Latin responsories. The cathedral in Mexico City adopted the change in 1756, leading to a proliferation of newly composed responsories.<sup>27</sup> In Guatemala, Vicente Sáenz implemented the change much later. According to composer José Eulalio Samayoa (1781-1866) who worked at the cathedral under Sáenz, Vicente's predecessor Nolasco Estrada, took such compositional liberties with his villancicos in 1797, that the cathedral chapter mandated he replace them with responsories. When Vicente Sáenz assumed the duties of chapel master in 1805, he lobbied for villancicos be reinstated on special occasions. The cathedral chapter acquiesced on the condition that they reviewed and approved the villancicos ahead of time. Vicente initially followed this directive, but as the chapter failed to offer any meaningful feedback and soon even stopped reviewing the pieces, the chapel master retained his prerogative to choose whatever responsories and villancicos he deemed appropriate.<sup>28</sup>

While Vicente strived to accommodate both older Spanish traditions and recent practices by judiciously programming responsories and villancicos, his son Benedicto Sáenz Álvarez introduced Italian opera to the cathedral with Vicente's tacit approval. Beyond his cathedral duties as church organist, Benedicto remained abreast of secular music trends through his work as a private voice teacher of young women.<sup>29</sup> He capitalized on the growing demand for Italian songs, and eventually programmed them at church, where his students performed duets from Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* and opera excerpts by Matteo Rauzzini. Given the enthusiastic reception of his Italian selections, the organist proceeded to program more Italian duets and arias at church in *contrafactum*, passing them as villancicos.<sup>30</sup> After Independence in 1821, the demand for Italian music only grew stronger inside and outside the church. Benedicto's musical selections followed the trend, featuring music from Pergolesi to Rossini. The *contrafactum* notwithstanding, audiences recognized the music and expected to hear fragments from *Barber of Seville*, and *La Gazza Ladra* at celebrations of feast days honoring the Virgin and saints.<sup>31</sup> The blatant use of operatic repertoire at church eventually drew criticism.<sup>32</sup>

Besides the inclusion of excerpts of Italian opera in liturgical contexts, Cathedral musicians abundantly used instrumental music and large masses by European composers. When advocating for musical reforms for church music in 1843, Eulalio Samayoa described such practices and opposed the

<sup>27</sup> Goldman, "The Matins Responsory," 22-26.

<sup>28</sup> José Eulalio Samayoa, "Apéndice histórico al plan de reformas piadosas en la música de los templos de Guatemala. Junio de 1843," ed. Dieter Lehnhoff, *Cultura de Guatemala*, (September-December 1996): 93-96.

<sup>29</sup> Benedicto also fulfilled some of Vicente's chapel master duties. Vicente instructed the chapel to follow Benedicto's requests as if they were his own.

<sup>30</sup> Not everyone enjoyed the performance, as Eulalio Samayoa documents. He writes that the performance infuriated the canon, who severely reprimanded Benedicto for having violated the dictum *mulier taceat in ecclesia* (the students who performed at church were young women). Benedicto noted that the canon's disapproval did not concern the choice of repertoire, however. Samayoa, "Apéndice histórico," 98-100.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-105.

<sup>32</sup> A presbyter asked Benedicto to stop performing his "villancicos *pirujos*" at church. "Pirujo" is a derogatory term meaning common or profane, or according to Samayoa unholy, heretic, impure. *Ibid.*, 103.

performance of overtures and symphonic movements, especially minuets by Haydn. Samayoa first objected to the poor quality of such musical performances, blaming it on musicians with little training attempting to perform difficult music from memory. Furthermore, he found the use of music intended for secular entertainment objectionable in a sacred space.<sup>33</sup> Quoting from a clergyman in his calls for reform, he comments (in parenthesis):

He who hears the organ play the same minuet (today replaced with waltzes by Extráus [sic., referring to Johan Strauss Sr.]) that he heard at the evening party, what will he think about except the lady with whom he danced that night? In this way, music that should lift the congregant's spirit from an earthly plane to a celestial one, instead transports the church to the party. And depending on his temperament or bad disposition, his imagination may not stop there.<sup>34</sup>

Samayoa similarly critiqued the liturgical performances of large masses that display compositional prowess at the expense of their liturgical function, also noting that in many cases the composers did not profess Roman Catholicism. He conceded, however, that such foreign masses had a place in civic ceremonies.<sup>35</sup>

Considering that Benedicto Sáenz Álvarez seemed to prioritize the adaptation of opera tunes, waltzes, and symphonic movements over composing original music, his son, Benedicto Sáenz Vallejo probably wrote the more reserved *Libera Me* currently preserved at the museum of modern art. Sáenz Vallejo succeeded his grandfather Vicente Sáenz as chapel master in 1841.<sup>36</sup> The young Benedicto did not follow his father's approach and discontinued the programming of operatic *contrafacta*. *La Gaceta de El Salvador* printed the following on July 1853:

We have seen with great satisfaction that Mr. D. Benedicto Saenz [sic.] has introduced in Guatemala the performance of works by the best composers, and that he is abandoning the ridiculous parodies of theatrical pieces in the temples. Hopefully his example will be followed in other places in Central America... Many a times, despite ourselves, we have been made to suffer by hearing singing ridiculous profane verses in the middle of a celebration of the divine offices, and our ear has been wounded by the ridiculous performance of an opera aria... Religious music has very famous ancient and modern composers, whose collections of masses, motets, etc., are easily available in Europe, it is difficult to choose among the works by Mozart, Pergolése [sic.], Haydn, Lesueur [sic.], Cherubini, Rossini, the abbey Rosa, and many others.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Dieter Lehnhoff, "El 'Plan de reformas piadosas' y el 'Apéndice hstórico' (1843) de José Eulalio Samayoa: Primera Historia de la Música en Guatemala," *Cultura de Guatemala*, (September-December 1996): 72.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>35</sup> Samayoa may have been referring to large choral-orchestral pieces derived from sacred music but designed for concert performances, such as Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* or Berlioz's *Requiem*. *Ibid.*, 62-68.

<sup>36</sup> Benedicto Sáenz Álvarez would have probably succeeded Vicente, had he not passed away in 1831.

<sup>37</sup> *La Gaceta de El Salvador*, July 15, 1853, 3-4.

As the *Gaceta* indicates, instead of opera, Benedicto Sáenz used older and recent music from Europe composed for church functions. While in some respects distinct from theatrical music, sacred works by the composers cited above still exhibit secular traits distinct from the traditions of Spain of earlier times. Additionally, Sáenz's *Libera Me* shows connections with secular trends more common in the Americas than in Europe.

### **Musical Form and Style of *Libera Me***

Efforts to replace villancicos with responsories through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries suggests the desire by Spanish authorities to preserve or restore an old colonial habitus amid changing political, social, and cultural conditions. In that context, funerary responsories seemed particularly adept at communicating a Spanish colonial identity. While designed to honor monarchs and high-ranking church officials in the Middle Ages, polyphonic settings of masses and offices for the dead in Spain and Latin America extended to honoring decedents of lower social strata and became part of a broader Spanish Catholic culture. According to musicologist George Grayson Wagstaff,

the music for the dead reveals itself as a remarkable tradition not only because of its musical importance, which should be self-evident since the repertory includes works by almost all the important composers of Spain and Latin America during this period [sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries], but also because it was part of a system of beliefs that expressed a uniquely Iberian and, later, Latin American concern for commemorating the dead with polyphony, music that evermore came to be considered just as appropriate for the death of one's neighbor as it was for the death of the emperor.<sup>38</sup>

The *Libera Me* responsory corresponds to the Office of the Dead, which would take place at a service honoring a decedent, including absolution rituals. In the case of absolution, the responsory is usually performed besides the coffin following a Requiem mass and before the burial. Austere musical settings often correspond to this context; however, more elaborate settings could take place at Matins in All Soul's Day (November 2) when all deceased Christians are honored. Breviaries such as the *Breviarium Benedictinum* of the eighteenth century, outline the text as consisting of three versicles and one respond/repetendum, along with its performance structure (Tables 1 and 2).<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> George Grayson Wagstaff, "Music for the Dead: Polyphonic Settings of the 'Officium' and 'Missa pro Defunctis' by Spanish and Latin American Composers before 1630" (Ph.D., United States – Texas, The University of Texas at Austin, 1995), 1, 11, <http://search.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/304228308/abstract/770C9659671542DDPQ/2>.

<sup>39</sup> *Breviarium Benedictinum*, 1725.

**Table 1.** Textual structure of *Libera Me* and translation.

Structure	Latin Text	English Translation
Intonation/ Respond	Líbera me Dómine, de morte aetérna, in die illa treménda: Quando caeli movéndi sunt et terra: Dum véneris judicáre saeculum per ignem.	Deliver me, O Lord, from death eternal on that fearful day: When the heavens and the earth shall be moved, When thou shalt come to judge the word by fire.
Versicle 1	Tremens factus sum ego, et tímeo; dum discússio vénerit ; atque ventúra ira.	I am made to tremble, and I fear, till the judgment be upon us, and the coming wrath.
Versicle 2	Dies illa, dies irae, calamitátis et misériae, dies magna et amára valdè.	That day, day of wrath, calamity and misery, day of great and exceeding bitterness.
Versicle 3	Réquiem aetérnam dona eis Dómine: et lux perpétua lúceat eis.	Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord: and let light perpetual shine upon them.

**Table 2.** Performance Structure of *Libera Me. Brevarium Benedictinum.*

Structure	Latin Text	English Translation
Intonation/ Respond	Líbera me Dómine, de morte aetérna, in die illa treménda: Quando caeli movéndi sunt et terra: Dum véneris judicáre saeculum per ignem.	Deliver me, O Lord, from death eternal on that fearful day: When the heavens and the earth shall be moved, When thou shalt come to judge the word by fire.
Versicle 1	Tremens factus sum ego, et tímeo; dum discússio vénerit ; atque ventúra ira.	I am made to tremble, and I fear, till the judgment be upon us, and the coming wrath.
Repetendum 1	Quando caeli movéndi sunt et terra:	When the heavens and the earth shall be moved
Versicle 2	Dies illa, dies irae, calamitátis et misériae, dies magna et amára valdè.	That day, day of wrath, calamity and misery, day of great and exceeding bitterness.
Repetendum 2	Dum véneris judicáre saeculum per ignem.	When that shalt come to judge the word by fire.
Versicle 3	Réquiem aetérnam dona eis Dómine: et lux perpétua lúceat eis.	Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord: and let light perpetual shine upon them.
Respond	Líbera me Dómine, de morte aetérna, in die illa treménda: Quando caeli movéndi sunt et terra: Dum véneris judicáre saeculum per ignem.	Deliver me, O Lord, from death eternal on that fearful day: When the heavens and the earth shall be moved, When that shalt come to judge the word by fire.

Sáenz organized his *Libera Me* in six short sections. Though one of them modulates, the responsory as a whole is set in D minor, a key used to express sorrow, grief, and anguish in pieces such as Haydn's *Missa in Angustiis* (Nelson Mass) and Mozart's *Requiem*. In the extant parts I examined, Sáenz (or his copyist) did not include the liturgical text in its entirety but referenced the not-composed verses at the end of sections, outlining the repetition scheme. According to tradition, the portions not set polyphonically could have been intoned by a cantor, most likely in plainchant (Figure 2). Table 3 outlines Sáenz setting, including the length of sections, repetition scheme, and tonality.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Since Sáenz only indicated the opening words of the chanted text, I fill in the implied remaining text within brackets.

*Liberamé à 4. voces p.<sup>r</sup> D.<sup>u</sup> B. Saenz.*

*Maestros.*  
*Soprans.*

*N.º 1.* *Li be-ran-me Do-mi-ne Li be-ran-me Do-mi-ne*  
*de mor-te a ter-na de - mor-te a ter-na de*  
*mor-te de mor-te de mor-te a ter-na* *In iu-illa.*

*N.º 2.* *Quan-do ce-li no ven-di sunt et*  
*ter-ra et ter-ra no ven-di sunt et ter-ra no ven-di sunt et*  
*ter-ra no ven-di sunt no ven-di sunt et ter-ra.* *Dum ven-erit.*

Figure 2. Excerpt of the Soprano part of Libera Me.

Table 3. Sáenz setting of *Libera Me*.

Section	Liturgical structure	Text	Setting	Measures	Key
1	Intonation and Respond	Libera me Dómine de morte aetérna	Polyphony	1-18	D minor
2		In die illa [treménda]	Not set (chanted)	Not Applicable	
3		Quando coeli movéndi sunt et terra	Polyphony	19-35	D minor
4		[Dum véneris iudicáre saeculum per ignem.]	Not set or referenced (omitted?)	Not Applicable	
5	Versicle 1	Tremens factus sum ego	Polyphony	36-57	D minor
6		Et tímeo [dum discússio vénerit, atque ventúra ira.]	Not set (chanted)	Not Applicable	
2	Repetendum 1	Quando coeli movéndi sunt et terra	Polyphony (repeat)	19-35	D minor
7	Versicle 2	Dies illa, dies irae	Polyphony	58-74	D minor
8		calamintatis [et misériae, dies magna et amára valde]	Not set (chanted)	Not Applicable	
4	Repetendum 2	[Dum véneris iudicáre saeculum per ignem.]	Not set (chanted)	Not Applicable	
9	Versicle 3	Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine	Polyphony	75-98	Modulates from F (III) to A (V)
10		et lux perpetua [luceat eis.]	Not set (chanted)	Not Applicable	
1	Respond	Libera me, Dómine de morte aetérna	Polyphony (repeat)	1-18	D minor
2		Quando coeli movéndi sunt et terra	Polyphony (repeat)	19-35	D minor
11	Kyrie	Kyrie eleison	Polyphony	99-114	D minor
12		Christe [eleison]	Not set (chanted)	19-35	D minor
11		Kyrie eleison	Polyphony	99-114	D minor

Stylistically, *Libera Me* shows different influences. Sáenz uses galant idioms in string figurations, such as measured tremolos on chord tones, arpeggiation of predominant harmonies, scalar passages, and neighbor and passing tones. These figurations generate motion while maintaining a steady harmonic rhythm (Examples 1a and 1b). However, despite these galant idioms, pervasive chromaticism gives the piece Romantic inflections from the beginning. When the choir enters in the second measure, Sáenz gives a chromatic twist to a traditional galant phrase paring. He sets the words *Libera me Domine* (deliver me Lord) syllabically as a three-bar antecedent phrase that

begins in tonic moves to the dominant through a G-sharp diminished seventh chord. The consequent phrase consists of a repetition of the antecedent but transposed chromatically down a whole step (C minor, F-sharp diminished seventh, and G-minor). The transposition suggests a chromatic variation on the Fonte schemata that would riposte the initial minor phrase with a major one (Example 2). Note, however, that the reference to the Fonte is only in the general idea of transposing the antecedent phrase down a step as a riposte. The Fonte schemata traditionally involves a pattern between bass and soprano lines that Sáenz does not follow.<sup>41</sup>

**Example 1.** Galant figurations in the first violin part of *Libera Me.*”

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled 'Violin' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Vln.'. Both staves are in C minor (one flat) and common time. The top staff begins with a series of chords: C minor, F-sharp diminished seventh, and G minor. It then features a series of rapid sixteenth-note passages, some with chromatic shifts. The bottom staff continues with similar sixteenth-note passages, including some with slurs and accents, and ends with a few chords and a final note.

**Example 1a.** Movement “Libera Me” measures 12 to 18.

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled 'Vln.' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Vln.'. Both staves are in C minor (one flat) and common time. The top staff begins with a series of chords: C minor, F-sharp diminished seventh, and G minor. It then features a series of rapid sixteenth-note passages, some with chromatic shifts. The bottom staff continues with similar sixteenth-note passages, including some with slurs and accents, and ends with a few chords and a final note.

**Example 1b.** Movement “Dies Irae” measures 68-74.

<sup>41</sup> Gjerdingen, *Music in the Galant Style*, 61-71.

Example 2. Chromatic phrase pairing alluding to the Fonte schemata. Measures 1 to 7.

The image displays a musical score for the first seven measures of a piece. It is divided into two systems. The first system includes the Soprano and Alto vocal parts, the Tenor and Bass vocal parts, and the Orchestral Reduction. The second system includes the Soprano and Alto vocal parts, the Tenor and Bass vocal parts, and the Orchestral Reduction. The lyrics are: "Li - be - ra me Do - mi - ne". The score is in common time (C) and features a chromatic phrase pairing alluding to the Fonte schemata. The vocal parts are written in treble and bass clefs, and the orchestral reduction is written in treble and bass clefs. The lyrics are: "Li - be - ra me Do - mi - ne".

To a large extent, *Libera Me* owes its coherence to dotted rhythms, which function as a unifying motive. Their relentless recurrence gives the responsory a martial quality (more on that below). However, Sáenz does not link the rhythm to a specific melodic idea, and therefore it does not function as a building block for larger themes. In fact, besides its augmentation of in “Kyrie” and “Quando coelis,” little development occurs. Unlike composers of the era who often develop motives through variations, sequences, fugatos, and transpositions to different harmonic areas, Sáenz’s maintains a simple harmonic plan (despite surface chromaticism) with little counterpoint. When counterpoint appears in the form of staggered entrances, melodic independence soon collapses into homorhythm. In general, Sáenz prefers to emphasize the text and foreground the rhythm.

With regards to part-writing, Sáenz sometimes disregards voice-leading rules on parallel motion. *Libera Me* features three types of parallelism. First, the parallel octaves between the alto and

bass on measures 76, 77, and 108 transgress the standards of common-practice voice-leading. Most analysts might regard them as part-writing errors. Second, the parallel fifths that occur in measure 12 between the bass and tenor are not strictly-speaking an error but are usually avoided in common-practice tonality. The chord spelled as F# (Gb enharmonically)—Db—Bb—E in the second beat functions a German Augmented Six chord (in Bb Major) that resolves to a dominant chord (F major). While common-practice conventions recommend a delayed resolution of the Ger+6 by means of a second inversion tonic or a different augmented six chord to avoid parallelism, they nevertheless allow parallel fifths in a direct resolution to the dominant. In such cases, composers opt to hide the parallelism in inner-voices, but Sáenz keeps it exposed. Even with the somewhat awkward parallelism, the inclusion of the augmented-six chord adds chromatic color and emotional intensity to the otherwise stable harmonic areas of the piece (Example 3).

**Example 3.** Examples of parallelism in *Libera Me*.

Example 3 shows a musical score for four voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The lyrics are "Re-qui-em ae - ter - nam ae - ter - nam ae - ter - nam". Red lines highlight parallel motion between the Alto and Bass parts in measure 76.

**Example 3a.** Parallelism in “Requiem Aeternam,” measure 76.

Example 3b shows a musical score for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The lyrics are "Ky - ri - e e - lei - son.". Red lines highlight parallel motion between the Alto and Bass parts in measures 108-110.

**Example 3b.** Parallelism in “Kyrie,” measures 108-110.

The image shows a musical score for four voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The music is in C minor (one flat) and common time (C). The lyrics are 'na de mor - te ae - ter - na de'. A red box highlights the notes in measure 12, showing parallel fifths between the Tenor and Bass parts. The notes in the box are G# (Tenor) and G (Bass) in the first half, and F# (Tenor) and F (Bass) in the second half.

**Example 3c.** Parallelism following an enharmonic German +6 chord in “Libera me,” measures 11-13.

The third kind of parallelism in *Libera Me* occurs in the “Dies irae” and can hardly be dismissed as an error or an awkward resolution; it contributes to the effect of the movement. The “Dies irae” opens with a rising three-leg sequence on the words *Dies illa, dies irae* (that day, the day of wrath). The first statement set to D minor, the second to E flat major seventh, the third (modified statement) to E major. The modified statement introduces a call-response texture between the soprano and the rest of the choir as the bass moves to a first inversion position (E major with G sharp on the bass) from where a sequential chromatic descent (from G sharp to F) follows.<sup>42</sup> At the end of this brief two-measure descent, the texture thins. Sopranos and tenors double each other in octaves as they descend chromatically from C to A and then rise again chromatically back to C during the next two measures. Through this motion, parallel fifths emerge with the altos who descend chromatically from G to E and then move back up to G. The result is two measures of consecutive parallel fifths! This is no mere accident or error, but a deliberate compositional choice for musical effect. In contexts such as impressionism, analysts sometimes refer to this type of parallelism as *planning*, but in common-practice tonality it is virtually nonexistent (Example 4).

<sup>42</sup> Parallel fifths occur between alto and tenor on measure 66.

Example 4. "Dies Irae," movement 4, measures 58-74."

**Allegro**

Flute

Clarinet in C

Bassoon

Trumpet in D

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello/Bass

Di-es il-la di-es i - rae.

Di-es il-la di-es i - rae.

Di-es il-la di-es i - rae.

Di-es il-la di-es i - rae.

62

Fl.

C Cl.

Bsn.

D Tpt.

S

A

T

B

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Di-es il - la di-es i - rae. Di-es il - la di-es

Di-es il - la di-es i - rae. Di-es il - la

Di-es il - la di-es i - rae. Di-es il - la

Di-es il - la di-es i - rae. Di-es il - la

Detailed description: This page of a musical score, numbered 120, is titled 'DIAGONAL'. It features a vocal quartet (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a full orchestra. The vocal parts have lyrics in Latin: 'Di-es il - la di-es i - rae. Di-es il - la di-es'. The instrumental parts include Flute, Clarinet in C, Bassoon, Trumpet in D, Violin I and II, Viola, and Violoncello. The score is written in a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature. The vocal parts are in a soprano, alto, tenor, and bass clef respectively. The instrumental parts are in their respective clefs. The score is divided into four measures, with a measure number '62' at the beginning of each line. The vocal parts have lyrics under the notes. The instrumental parts have various rhythmic patterns and dynamics. The score is enclosed in a green border.

66

Fl.

C Cl.

Bsn.

D Tpt.

S

A

T

B

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

i - rae di-es i - rae di-es i - rae. Di - es il - la di - es

di-es i - rae. Di - es il - la di - es i - rae. Di - es il - la di - es i - rae. Di - es

di-es i - rae. Di - es il - la di - es i - rae. Di - es il - la di - es i - rae. Di - es

di-es i - rae. Di - es il - la di - es i - rae. Di - es il - la di - es i - rae. Di - es

70

Fl.

C Cl.

Bsn.

D Tpt.

S

A

T

B

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

i - rae.Di - es il - la di - es i - rae.Di-es il - la di-es i - rae.

il - la di - es i - rae di - es i - rae.Di-es il - la di-es i - rae.

il - la di - es i - rae di - es i - rae.Di-es il - la di-es i - rae.

il - la di - es i - rae di - es i - rae.Di-es il - la di-es i - rae.

Fittingly, Sáenz's "planning" contributes to the distinctive character of the "Dies irae," the most dramatic moment in the responsory. The hollow texture created by the parallelism may have surprised or shocked listeners. Besides this change in textures and departure from harmonic rules, Sáenz heightens the movement's intensity in two other ways. First, he darkens the movement by emphasizing a tritone in the bass, which moves between a D and a G sharp. Second, he imbues the movement with extreme chromaticism.

In sum, in its form and function, this responsory evokes a Spanish colonial identity. Stylistically, it draws from different European traditions while also breaking away from part-writing conventions and avoidance of motivic development.

### Musical Topics

Analysis of the musical topics in *Libera Me* further reveals European as well as more distinct local elements. Simply defined, a musical topic is a genre or style taken outside its usual context and incorporated into a different style or genre, thus creating musical cross-references.<sup>43</sup> The topics in *Libera Me* derive from its ubiquitous dotted rhythms.

The piece opens with this motive in the first bar: quarter note, dotted eighth, sixteenth, quarter, quarter rest. The choral parts then repeat it on the words *libera me*. While the orchestra mostly offers harmonic support throughout this opening section, it also punctuates each statement of *libera me Domine* with the same rhythm (see Example 2). Sáenz departs from the motive briefly to accent the prosody of the Latin text, but then brings it back in the next movement on the words "quando coeli" in the alto, tenor, and bass parts. Sáenz then uses the rhythm in augmentation on the soprano line on the words "celi" and "sum et [terra]." Throughout the "Tremens," Sáenz alternates dotted rhythms with eighth-note triplets in the orchestral parts. The brief interlude on measure 43 insistently asserts dotted rhythms on every beat with the bassoons and strings oscillating between D flat (dotted eighth) and C (sixteenth) in unison while all other parts remain tacet. A similar idea closes the section on measure 57, where unisons Ds (dotted eighths) and C sharps (sixteenth) alternate. The rhythmic motive appears in augmentation again in "Requiem aeternam," matching the prosodic accent of the word *requiem*. After staggered entrances of the basses, sopranos, altos, and tenors (in that order), all parts sing the augmented rhythmic motive in homorhythm on the words "dona" and "Domine." In the "Kyrie," the orchestra plays the motive twice. The pattern reappears in the same durations as the opening measure, but rather than resting on the fourth beat, Sáenz adds a trill on a dotted eighth followed by two thirty-second notes that resolve the trill to the tonic on the downbeat of the next measure. Also departing from the use of the rhythm in the first bar, this time it does not merely articulate tonic but moves to the dominant on the fourth beat. The orchestra then provides supporting harmonies and galant figurations in the strings until the end of the movement. The augmented version of the motive appears on measure 104, in the soprano, alto, and tenor settings of the word "Kyrie." The rhythm closes the movement in the last measure. As mentioned earlier, dotted rhythms occur in almost every beat of the "Dies irae."

---

<sup>43</sup> Mirka, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, 2.

From a topical standpoint, the opening dotted figure played at the *Maestoso* tempo in the first movement suggests the common opening gesture of the French overture. Additionally, the rhythm also gives the piece a military tone.<sup>44</sup> At least since the French Revolution, military topics developed a close connection to funerary marches and other funeral music.<sup>45</sup> With the spread of militarism that followed the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, military and funeral music found their way into the concert repertoire.<sup>46</sup> Beethoven used funeral marches with dotted rhythms in the second movement of his sonata in A flat major Op. 26 (1800-1801) and the *Eroica* symphony (1803-1805). Similarly, Chopin included dotted rhythms in the second movement of his piano sonata No. 2 Op. 35 (1840), possibly the most iconic of all funeral marches. Funerary dotted rhythms also appear in Berlioz's *Grande symphonie funèbre et triomphale* (1840), and Liszt's *Héroïde funèbre* (1850).

Given that the funeral march comes from a *secular* ceremonial context, it rarely functions as a topic in religious music. The related military topic without funerary associations appears more commonly in liturgical settings, often as short fanfares. For instance, Mozart foregrounded dotted rhythms in his Grand Mass in C minor (K. 427/417a, "Gratias," "Qui tollis," "Jesu Christe") and his D minor Requiem (K. 626, "Requiem aeternam," "Kyrie," and "Rex tremedae"). When considering the meaning of the texts and the characteristic over-dotting of the French style applied in performance, dotted rhythms in most movements of the C minor mass and the "Rex tremendae" in the requiem seem to connote royal processions associated with French overtures. In these examples, the most martial passage is the Credo of the C minor mass, which features homorhythmic singing, interludes by the winds, dotted rhythms, and the other predominant militaristic rhythm: the fanfare consisting of eighth-note (or sometimes dotted quarter) followed by two sixteenth-notes. Haydn displays military topics more overtly in the Kyrie of *Missa in Angustiis* (Lord Nelson, Hob. XXII:11, 1798), a piece written within the context of the Napoleonic wars. The movement includes dotted rhythms, the fanfare rhythm, and ornamentation (trills) evoking snare drums. Similarly, his *Paukenmesse* or *Missa in tempore belli* (Hob. XII:9, 1796) is peppered with dotted rhythms connoting militarism.

Still, funeral associations remain rare, even in liturgies for the dead. The closest use of dotted rhythms as a funeral march topic may be the introit of Mozart's requiem. Following the soprano solo, the orchestra accompanies the choir singing *exaudi orationem meam ad te omnis caro veniet* with vigorous dotted-rhythms. However, given the place of the rhythms at the introit of the mass, it may more strongly connote a French overture processional. "Et incarnatus est" from Haydn's *Paukenmesse* may be an example of a funerary march in a liturgical setting. The choice of funeral music for a text that opens describing the conception of Jesus is unusual, but in the context of Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars and in a mass whose title openly references war, it makes sense to view a human birth not as a joyous occasion but as a sorrowful one, as if inviting purity and

<sup>44</sup> The use of dotted rhythms in military marches has been well documented. They are mentioned in various texts, including composition treatises of the nineteenth century, and in Ratner's proposition of musical topics in the 1980s. Czerny, *School of Practical Composition*, 109-113 and Ratner, *Classic Music*, 18-19.

<sup>45</sup> To name but a few of many possible examples, dotted-rhythms appear in Gossec's "Marche Lugubre" (1790), Beethoven's *Funeral Cantata on the Death of Joseph II* (1790), and the *Symphonie funèbre* by Joseph Martin Kraus (1792).

<sup>46</sup> Julian Horton also acknowledges the use of military topics in other contexts of 19th century music. Similarly, Maiko Kawabata studied their impact into the violin solo repertoire. Horton, in *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, 643-44; Kawabata, "Virtuoso Codes of Violin Performance," 89-107.

innocence into a world of chaos and destruction. The funeral topic here also foreshadows Jesus's death and thus unifies this section of the mass with the subsequent parts of the movement describing the Christ's crucifixion and death.

While European composers sparingly used military and/or funeral march topics in liturgical works, Sáenz follows Latin American musical trends, where military and funeral topics more frequently crossed over into the sacred sphere. Beyond the celebrated tradition of elaborate funeral music noted by Wagstaff, the New World also boasted a rich history of military bands and religious processions where civic and religious spaces melded.<sup>47</sup> These performances acquired new prestige and signification at the turn of the nineteenth century, when ideas of Enlightenment found expression in revolutionary and independence movements throughout the continent. In his influential history of music in Mexico, Otto Mayer-Serra documented the prominence of military music in sacred contexts, which he attributed to patriotism during the Mexican independence movement. He cited the following critique published in *Diario de México* in 1806:

I have spoken on all subjects, except on the bad form one finds at burials, of so much trumpet and other bellicose instruments that make burials look like fandangos or theatrical battle fields, rather than [showing] serenity and sensitivity; forgetting all that the Holy Fathers have recommended, especially Saint Gregory, having so many followed the recommended [use] of plainchant, which is serious, grave, and proper to the church, who has not forgetting its necessity despite said introduction. Good music that is well performed excites the affects that need to be moved and may be quite proper at burials; but those they call *ratonera*, noisy, and of trumpet blows must only serve the [battle] field.<sup>48</sup>

Mayer-Serra comments: “As it appears, the patriotic exaltation in the colonies infused a militaristic tone even in the music played at burials, organists acquiesced to include in the liturgy pieces that were in vogue in the high classes of the metropolitan society.”<sup>49</sup>

Given the increased popularity of opera throughout the Americas, and its use in sacred spaces, the dotted rhythms in Sáenz's “*Dies irae*” may also suggest the *ombra* topic. *Ombra* refers to opera scenes displaying supernatural phenomena such as the apparition of ghosts, witches, oracles, and demons. Since the seventeenth century, dramatic music heightened the sense spectacle and fear conveyed in such scenes. Clive McClelland summarizes the characteristics of *ombra* topics in terms of their general mood, tempi, tonalities, harmonies, melodies, bass lines, figurations, rhythms, textures, dynamics, and instrumentations.<sup>50</sup> Sáenz's “*Dies irae*” fits most of McClelland's characteristics. Set in a flat and minor key (D minor) with abundant chromaticism, the exclamatory and fragmented melody features contrasts between leaps and stepwise motion. Melodic repetition occurs through sequences. The figuration includes falling scales in the first violins. As discussed, the “ponderous dotted rhythms” are foregrounded in almost every beat. The octave doublings mentioned earlier contribute to the non-imitative texture of the topic. The “*Dies irae*” also includes

<sup>47</sup> Baker and Knighton, eds., *Music and Urban Society in Colonial Latin America*.

<sup>48</sup> Mayer-Serra, *Panorama de la música mexicana*, 62-63. Translation mine.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* Translation mine.

<sup>50</sup> McClelland, in *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, 282.

tremolo effects in the figuration, including notated tremolos and the four-pitch pattern of sixteenth notes found at the opening and throughout the movement.<sup>51</sup>

### Between Modernities

The musical topics and styles in *Libera Me* evidence Sáenz's keen awareness of the trends in Western European and American compositions of his day and suggest carefully reasoned compositional choices. Rather than relying on techniques to unify the movements such as motivic development, Sáenz builds coherence through topics, thereby honoring the music's liturgical function: movements follow the structure of the ritual rather than contribute to a larger musical form better suited for concert performance. Only the dramatic "Dies irae" that suggests a climax stands out as a moment with musical structural potential. Dotted rhythms, occurring at different tempi, with different texts, in augmentation, and in combination with different stylistic elements not only evoke European topics like the French overture and *ombra*, but also follow the regional precedent of recontextualizing civic funeral marches in sacred settings.

Given these interesting stylistic features, one might attribute the lack of attention to this piece, or to the genre of nineteenth-century sacred music in Latin America more broadly, to the scarcity of sources, or even to the ideological orientation of musicological research in the Americas that has traditionally focused on distinctly local musical features that exoticize or Orientalize the repertoire or help feature it as part of national or proto-national traditions. More broadly, one could attribute the scholarly oversight to paradigm changes in nineteenth-century musical thought that consolidated the categories of art and functional music and privileged the study of concert pieces.

Nevertheless, Sáenz's *Libera Me* suggests that more nuanced processes also "silence" this repertoire. Together with its possible performance history well into the 1870s suggested by Lafuente's part copies, as well as the history of responsories in Spain and Latin America, *Libera Me* manifests the confluence of the European identities of the Spanish and French modernities that competed against each other throughout the region in the form of independence movements and the power struggles between Conservatives and Liberals. The survival of cathedral music traditions and the genre of the responsory in particular so far into the nineteenth century show the enduring legacy of Spanish modernity. On the other hand, styles that Sáenz borrowed from the more recent secular practices such as funeral military marches and the operatic *ombra* topic indicate the influence of the newer modernity of Enlightenment, Liberalism, and the French Revolution/independence movements. The convergence of both modernities into a single piece, however, does not make it legible within one tradition or the other. Instead, the piece seems ambiguously up-to-date with contemporaneous trends while also starkly old-fashioned. Not clearly fitting established narratives of European modernity and music history, its potential significance is therefore "silenced."

In this respect, the notion of Occidentalism advanced by Latin American postcolonial scholars helps address the significance of this music. Paradigms of Occidentalism that posit it as a complement

---

<sup>51</sup> The sixteenth note figuration relates both to the *ombra* and the funeral march topics. In its martial form, trills and sixteenth-note figurations and other fast ornaments represent snare drums. In the context of the *ombra* topic the same ornaments and figurations add to the ominous mood of the movement. While both interpretations may apply in this case, the allegro tempo may favor the *ombra* topic over a funeral march.

to the Orientalism of the second modernity would interpret Western European music in the Americas as an imitation of the dominant European culture, which locals would aspire to assimilate in order to increase their own cultural and symbolic capitals. In this view, *Libera Me* would lack authenticity; its confluence of styles would suggest a failed attempt at understanding and emulating European music properly. However, understanding Occidentalism as the framework by which the colonial powers of Europe, in this case Spain, shaped the Western Hemisphere into a new self, a New Europe, unveils European cultural practices in the Americas as integral manifestations of locally cultivated European *habiti*. From this perspective, *Libera Me* does not express an aspiration to assimilate an essentialized Western European Other, but rather *Libera Me* reflects the struggles among European descendants in the Americas as they transition from an established Spanish colonial *habitus* to new *habiti* based on Enlightenment and Liberalism. Thus, this notion of Occidentalism opens new lines of inquiry into this neglected piece and similar repertoires.

In closing, although beyond the scope of the present article, I would be remiss not to mention that the Eurocentrism underlying this Occidentalism, along with its musical manifestations, can also in turn contribute to historical silencing processes, particularly those silencing forms of expression of Indigenous and African provenance. The social, political, and structural changes that opened Latin America's dominant culture to the influences of France and Western Europe more broadly in the nineteenth century, also brought with them an Orientalist mindset towards Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations who became internal "Others," in some sense "Orientalized." The change of one Eurocentric paradigm of modernity for another thus set the stage for how conceptions of nationalism and their corresponding racial politics would play out and find musical expressions throughout the region in the twentieth century.

## Bibliography

Amado Pineda, Andres. "The Fox Trot in a Nation of Cosmopolitans: Music and Race in Early Twentieth-Century Guatemala." Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, 2013.

Baker, Geoffrey, and Tess Knighton, eds. *Music and Urban Society in Colonial Latin America*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

*Breviarium Benedictinum*, 1725. <https://books.google.com.au/books?id=B6tEAAAACAAJ>, accessed July 2018.

Bohlman, Philip V. "On the Unremarkable in Music." *19th-Century Music* 16, no. 2 (1992): 203–16.

Burke, Richard. "Revolutionary and Operatic Models for the Funeral March of the Eroica Symphony." *The Beethoven Journal* 19, no. 1 (2004): 2–9.

Carredano, Consuelo, and Victoria Eli Rodríguez, eds. *Historia de la música en España e Hispanoamérica: La música en Hispanoamérica en el siglo XIX*. Vol. 6. 8 vols. Mexico City, Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2010.

Castro-Gómez, Santiago. *La Poscolonialidad Explicada a Los Niños*. Editorial Universidad del Cauca, 2005.

Clark, Walter Aaron. "The Philippines, Latin America, and Spain." In *Nineteenth-Century Choral Music*, edited by Donna M. Di Grazia, 449–71. New York and London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013.

Czerny, Carl. *School of Practical Composition*. Translated by John Bishop. Vol. 1. 3 vols. London: Cocks, 1848.

Davies, Drew Edward. "Finding 'Local Content' in the Music of New Spain." *Early Music America* 19, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 64,60-62.

Gandarias, Igor de. *Diccionario de La Música En Guatemala (Fase I: área Académica)*. Guatemala City: Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, Dirección General de Investigación, Programa Universitario de Investigación (DIGI), Centro de Estudios Folklóricos (CEFOL), 2009.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Diccionario de la música en Guatemala: Música popular y música popular tradicional (II fase)*. Guatemala City: Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, Dirección General de Investigación, Programa Universitario de Investigación (DIGI), Centro de Estudios Folklóricos (CEFOL), 2010.

\_\_\_\_\_. *La obra musical de Benedicto Sáenz (1807 - 1857)*. Colección música. Serie Joaquín Orellana; no 1; Variation: Colección música.; Serie Joaquín Orellana; no. 1. Ciudad de Guatemala: Editorial Cultura, Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, 2017.

Gelbart, Matthew. *The Invention of "Folk Music" and "Art Music": Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Gembero Ustárroz, María. “La Música En Hispanoamérica (1808-1914): Sonidos En Un Mundo En Vísperas de Su Independencia.” *Scherzo Editorial*, no. 231 (2008): 130–33.

Gjerdingen, Robert O. *Music in the Galant Style*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Goldman, Dianne Marie Lehmann. “The Matins Responsory at Mexico City Cathedral, 1575-1815.” Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 2014.

Izquierdo König, José Manuel. “Rossinian Opera in Translation: José Bernardo Alzedo’s Church Music in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Chile.” *The Opera Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (December 15, 2019): 251–75. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oq/kbaa008>.

Kawabata, Maiko. “Virtuoso Codes of Violin Performance: Power, Military Heroism, and Gender (1789-1830).” *19th-Century Music* 28, no. 2 (2004): 089–107.

Kramer, Lawrence. “Chopin at the Funeral: Episodes in the History of Modern Death.” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 54, no. 1 (2001): 97–125.

Lehnhoff, Dieter. *Creación musical en Guatemala*. Guatemala: Universidad Rafael Landívar, 2005.

\_\_\_\_\_. “El ‘Plan de reformas piadosas’ y el ‘Apéndice histórico’ (1843) de José Eulalio Samayoa: Primera Historia de la Música en Guatemala.” *Cultura de Guatemala*, (September-December 1996): 55–89.

Leservot, Typhaine. “Occidentalism: Rewriting the West in Marjane Satrapi’s *Persépolis*.” *French Forum* 36, no. 1 (2011): 115–30. <https://doi.org/10.1353/frf.2011.0004>.

Madrid, Alejandro L, and Robin D Moore. “Danzón as a Performance Complex.” In *Danzón: Circum-Caribbean Dialogues in Music and Dance*, 22–74. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Mayer-Serra, Otto. *Panorama de la música mexicana desde la independencia hasta la actualidad*. Mexico: El Colegio de México, 1941.

Mirka, Danuta, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*. Oxford Handbooks. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Ratner, Leonard G. *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style*. New York : London: Schirmer Books ; Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1980.

Paredes, Américo. “The Corrido on the Border.” In *With a Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero*, 129–50. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1958.

Samayoa, José Eulalio. “Apéndice histórico al plan de reformas piadosas en la música de los templos de Guatemala. Junio de 1843.” Edited by Dieter Lehnhoff. *Cultura de Guatemala*, (September-December 1996): 90–111.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.

Turino, Thomas. "Nationalism and Latin American Music: Selected Case Studies and Theoretical Considerations." *Latin American Music Review / Revista de Música Latinoamericana* 24, no. 2 (Autumn - Winter 2003): 169–209.

Vera, Alejandro. "¿Decadencia o progreso? La música del siglo XVIII y el nacionalismo decimonónico." *Latin American Music Review / Revista de Música Latinoamericana* 31, no. 1 (2010): 1–39.

Wagstaff, George Grayson. "Music for the Dead: Polyphonic Settings of the 'Officium' and 'Missa pro Defunctis' by Spanish and Latin American Composers before 1630." Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, 1995.

Amado Pineda, Andrés. "Benedicto Sáenz *Libera Me*: Occidentalisms in Latin America Nineteenth-Century Sacred Music." *Diagonal: An Ibero-American Music Review* 7, no. 2 (2022): 100–130.