In re-imagining Baroque-era music heard in the church services of, say, Puebla or Mexico City, this program draws on three vital traditions in Spanish and colonial Mexican music. First, there are the Latin hymns by Antonio de Salazar—*Aeterna Christi munera* and *Salve Regina,* for example—written in the refined style of vocal polyphony that was cultivated in late-Renaissance Europe and exported to the New World. Next are the popular dances typical of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Spain and transmitted in Santiago de Murcia's printed and manuscript collections of guitar music: the Payssanos, the Marizápalos, and, very early in its history, the Fandango. Last and most numerous are the villancicos, an old and originally secular genre of Spanish song that took on religious texts after the Counter-Reformation. In its origins, the villancico was a rustic style of popular song in a simple form of verses (coplas) that alternated with a refrain (estribillo) in various arrangements. Among composers in Spain's New World colonies during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the villancico enjoyed an impressive surge in popularity as music heard on important feast days, eventually rivaling the importance of older Latin church music. In this phase of its development, the villancico absorbed New World musical influences, especially rhythmic, and delivered its spiritual messages through colorful dialogs between characters derived not only from prominent Catholic saints, but also from the diverse peoples of Spain's vast colony in the Americas.

The Latin-texted hymns by Salazar exhibit a polyphonic style similar to that of Palestrina or Tomás Luis de Victoria, in which a new musical subject accompanies each line of the Latin text within a smooth and seamless texture. In colonial Mexico, these pieces would have represented the continuation of a classical style of vocal polyphony that was created in the second half of the sixteenth century after the Counter-Reformation, thus a New-World evocation of Old-World Catholic musical tradition. By contrast, the dances that Murcia wrote for the five-course Baroque (or Spanish)

guitar function here as instrumental intermezzos among the sacred vocal pieces. They exhibit the syncopated, triple-meter rhythms and harmonic drive that typify the dance repertory of the often vigorously strummed guitar, an identifiably Spanish popular style and a polar opposite from the Latin church pieces.

The villancicos, although sacred vocal music, are just as stylistically distant from the solemn dignity of the Latin hymns as are the instrumental dances. Compare, for example, the sound of any one of Salazar's Latin-texted pieces with any one of his Spanish-texted villancicos. But the tone of reverent devotion in the villancicos is no less palpable, because of the tableaux of lively religious ceremony and celebration that they depict, complete with singing, dancing, and the playing of instruments. Similar to the dances, the rhythmic vocabulary of the villancicos is animated by strong syncopation and frequent hemiola, usually within a lilting triple meter. Thus the ecstatic worshippers mentioned in ***Oygan la xacarilla*** and *A la xacara xacarilla* dance the boistrous Spanish folkdance known as the jácara (or xácara), or, in *Convidando está la noche,* the guaracha. But where these examples (and Murcia's dances) transmit the culture of the Iberian peninsula, other villancicos of colonial Mexico evoke the musical instruments, dances, and rhythmic style of west African and Aztec cultures. Thus, in *Tarará, yo soy Antón*, a moorish Antón proclaims that he will go to Bethlehem and dance the Puerto Rico and Cameroon (these are both dances) in celebration of the Nativity, or, in *A siolo Flasiquiyo!,* the celebrating people play the zambomba (a friction drum of the New World) along with the tambourine and rebec while dancing the guacambe.

The prominence of the musical imagery raises a fundamental question about performance practice: does the mention of such instruments and dances reflect a practice in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century church services that included them? We know that the Aztec tocotín was danced in the churches of

colonial Mexico, but opinion among scholars is divided both about the inclusion of instruments and about which instruments might have been featured. Nonetheless, current performances include assorted percussion on the evidence of the villancico texts, along with the Spanish guitar, both of which capture the flavor of Spanish tradition transformed by its new environment in the Americas.

The world described in the texts of these villancicos is one in which the people celebrating the Nativity are the conquered indigenous Mexicans and imported west African slaves, as well as Spaniards and their descendants. We know that villancico composers often categorized their compositions according to dance subgenres, such as the Spanish jácara or the Aztec tocotín, or according to the ethnicity of the worshippers they depicted, such as the villancico negro (African) or indio (Aztec). The distinctness of these ethnic identities comes through especially in the words spoken by the Africans or moors in *A siolo Flasiquiyo!,* where they speak sometimes in a dialect version of Spanish (thus "siolo" instead of "señor" and "Flasiquiyo" instead of "Francisco") or in Africanized nonsense syllables ("Tumbucutú, cutú, cutú"). Yet, in the festive villancicos of the Catholic missions and churches of colonial Mexico, all are saved by the Christian faith that they proclaim. We can therefore appreciate how the villancico of colonial Mexico—in both its musical characteristics and the language of its texts—represents an amalgamation of Iberian, west African, and Aztec cultures in the depiction of an idealized Christian world. Over time since the Baroque Era, the association of the villancico with feast days in the Christian calendar has narrowed to the Nativity, so that the current meaning of the villancico is, in essence, Christmas carol.

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