

Princeton Treated to Rarely Heard and Unique Performance of Spanish Baroque

When one thinks of the Baroque period of music history — that century and a half between 1600 and 1750—one usually thinks of the giants of the Italian and German schools of music. However, those same 150 years were experienced by the rest of the world as well, and lesser known but no less influential were the 17th century composers of Spain, Portugal and, across the Atlantic, Latin America. Virtually ignored by scholars of “Western” music until fairly recently, these composers and musical idioms combined the towering instrumental and keyboard forms of the rest of Europe with a particular flair from Hispanic dance and folk culture.

Música Ficta, an ensemble of four instrumentalists (one of whom also sings) was founded in 1988 in Bogotá, Colombia to explore the little known Renaissance and Baroque repertoire from Latin America and Spain. Through a three-way sponsorship of Princeton University Concerts, the University Program in Latin American Studies and Princeton’s Davis International Center, the energetic performers of Música Ficta brought their unique instrumental and musical styles to Richardson Auditorium on Saturday night.

The quartet is comprised of Jairo Serrano, the lone singer who doubles on Baroque guitar and percussion; Carlos Serrano playing recorder, shawm, dulcian, pipe, and tabor; Julian Navarro playing Baroque guitar, vihuela de mano and theorbo; and keyboard artist Elisabeth Wright at what was clearly a mature Baroque harpsichord. Not all these instruments were on display Saturday night, but the audience was treated nevertheless to florid recorder playing, precise guitar performance, and unusual vocal and instrumental repertoire based on several forms of Baroque Spanish dance.

Música Ficta introduced each of their numbers from the stage, explaining that the instrumental dances — the xácara, folía and chacona — would be followed in the concert by a more contemporary vocal arrangement based on the same dance.

The xácara was the rhythmic basis for a number of Spanish musical forms, and

Música Ficta presented an instrumental xácara with the aid of two Spanish guitars and a soprano recorder. Carlos Serrano played an ornate recorder part with fast finger work while Jairo Serrano sang the xácara-based “No hay que decirle el primer” with charm and precision between the text and guitar. All four of these performers are clearly classically trained, and relish presenting these musical heritage to audiences.

The folia, popular in 17th century Portugal, Italy, and central Europe, is a slower dance in triple meter, much like a slow waltz. With a double-dotted rhythm similar to the French composer Jean-Baptiste Lully and a fast second section, this dance resembled a Baroque French overture. The quartet made the transitions well to the quicker sections, with clean recorder and harpsichord.

Ms. Wright played an elegant harpsichord solo, demonstrating the intricate trills and florid capabilities of the instrument with very clean playing and fast finger work required from both hands. The final dance presented in the program, the chacona, was introduced by Mr. Navarro and Jairo Serrano on guitars, joined by a very light soprano recorder played by Carlos Serrano. As with several of the arrangements, when the vocal version of the dance began, Mr. Serrano switched to tenor recorder to better match the tenor voice of Jairo Serrano. Jairo Serrano sang the descriptive words of these songs with appeal and clarity, emphasizing the clever poetry and “play on words” of the text.

Several of the members of Música Ficta are from Latin America, but the common denominator in the ensemble seems to be the Early Music Institute at Indiana University, and Música Ficta is clearly focusing on an untapped reservoir of unusual repertoire. With a more than twenty year ensemble history, it is unusual that Música Ficta has not been to Princeton more often, but this performance may show that there are many musical treasures out there waiting to be discovered.

—Nancy Plum

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Orchestra • 8 pm, October 2

Symphony Orchestra • 4 pm, October 4

Anniversary Gala • 8 pm, October 10

Chamber Players • 3 pm, October 11

Chamber Orchestra • 8 pm, October 15

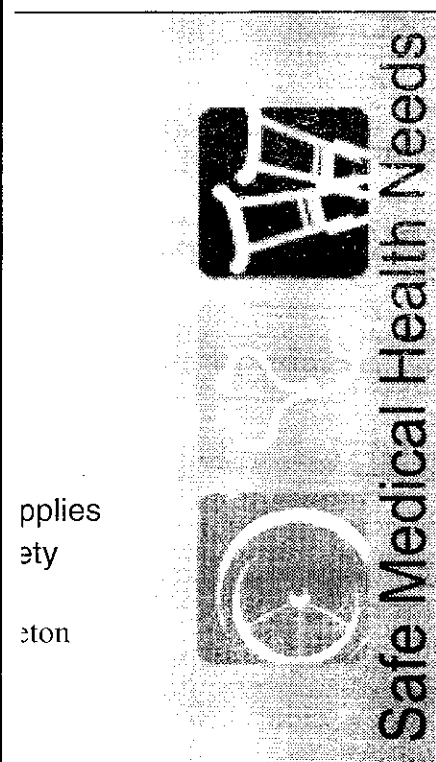
A Cappella Jam • 8 pm, October 16

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University Orchestra

October 24; 3 pm, October 25

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