



**Issue 40:2 (Nov/Dec 2016)**

**DOS ESTRELLAS LE SIGUEN: 17<sup>th</sup> Century Xácaras and Dances in Spain and Latin America • Música Ficta; Andrés Silva (ten); Antonio Santos (bar); Daniel Zuluaga (thb) • CENTAUR CRC 3501 (70:24)**

**Machado** *Dos estrellas le siguen* (Folía). **Spanish anonymous** *Xácara. No bay que decirle el primer* (Jácara). *Jácaras del cinco. Oh qué bien que baila Gil* (Chaconna). **Coll** *Xácara. Passacalles de primero tono*. **Hidalgo** *Noble en Tinacria Naciste* (Jácara). **Vidales** *Los que fueron de buen gusto* (Jácara). **Cabanilles** *Diferencias de folías p[rime]ro tono. Xácara 1° tono*. **Farinel** *Folía (Faronell's ground)*. **Aranes** *Un savran de la chacona*. **Sanz** *Chaconas. Jácaras. Gallardas. Fernandes* *Toquen los rabeles. Marín* *Sepan todos que muera*.

Classical, popular, or folk? Perhaps we tend to compartmentalize the different musical genres too strictly, as if they had originally developed on entirely separate tracks that only in recent times have begun to converge in new and creative ways. This CD by the Colombian early music ensemble *Música Ficta* offers a corrective to that view. Its program consists of seventeenth-century music in the Baroque style derived from popular dance forms prevalent throughout Spain and its Latin American colonies. Some of these forms—such as the *folía*, *chaconne*, *passacaglia*, and *galliard*—spread across Europe to become the basis for many famous classical works composed over the last 400 years (think of Bach's *Passacaglia in C minor* for Organ, the final movement of Brahms's *Fourth Symphony*, or the fourth *Sea Interlude* from Britten's *Peter Grimes*). But the most recurrent model is a form indigenous to Spain: the *jácara* (or *xácara*), which appears on this disc in a variety of guises, from solo keyboard works (such as the *Passacalles* for organ by Martín y Coll, performed here on the harpsichord), to the lively comic aria from Juan Hidalgo's opera *Celos aun del aire matan* (the libretto of which was written by the great playwright Calderón, based on a tale from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*). The pieces vary considerably in mood and tempo: the title song by Manuel Machado, for example, is slow and somber (surprisingly so, given that it's based on the *folía* dance form originally associated with fast and raucous music), the *Chaconas* by Gaspar Sanz, is indolent and sensual; and the three-part Christmas carol by Francisco de Vidales (modeled on the *jácara*), buoyant and affirmative. All of the works have that bedrock rhythmic vitality and lilt essential to all forms of folk dance and song, and often coupled with an enlivening improvisational freedom, as in the *Coll Xácara* for alto recorder, jarana, and baroque guitar, or the *Folía* (also known as *Faronell's ground*) by Michel Farinel. In several of the numbers, indigenous instruments such as castanets (in the Hidalgo area) or the jarana (an eight-string Mexican guitar) are incorporated to add local color to the usual instrumental mix.

*Música Ficta* has been performing and recording early Spanish and Latin American music for nearly thirty years. Its four core members—Carlos Serrano (recorders), Jairo Serrano (tenor, jarana, and percussion), Julian Navarro (Baroque guitar and jarana), and Elizabeth Wright (harpsichord)—are versatile musician-scholars who treat their material with affection as well as authority. There is something appealingly relaxed about their style—even in energetic numbers—that removes all traces of concert-hall formality from their music making. Carlos Serrano is an agile recorder virtuoso. Jairo sings his solo airs in an easy style and a clear, attractive tenor (augmented in the concerted numbers by the warm baritone of Antonio Santos and dulcet high tenor of Andrés Silva). Elizabeth Wright, a former student of Gustav Leonhardt, handles her solo assignments with unostentatious skill. In eight of the pieces, Daniel Zuluaga adds his theorbo to the regular grouping of guitars and harpsichord.

My one small criticism is that the booklet notes, which provide amply detailed background on each of the musical selections, might also have included a section discussing the overall shape of the program and the interpretive choices of the musicians. For example, the opening song, *Dos estrellas le siguen*—a hauntingly beautiful piece with a distinctive character quite different from the other selections—appears three times on the program, first in an arrangement for three voices and bass recorder, and in the final two bands, *a capella* and in a purely instrumental setting with no voices at all. The point is that in performances of early classical music up to and including the baroque, there is often a good deal of leeway as to the instrumental and vocal forces used in any given performance (especially considering that available musicians might vary considerably from event to event). It is always interesting to be told how musicians work out strategies to perform musical pieces with the resources they have, and also of the ways in which they experiment with different approaches, different ways of sounding and hearing the same notes. That leeway for improvisation is a more common and accepted feature of early music performance than of what used to be called the “standard” (late 1700s to mid-1900s) repertory. It is a quality that early music performers share with their colleagues in the jazz and popular idioms, and one of the reasons why early music has won such a notable following among younger audiences.

*Música Ficta* has recorded seven CDs, with an eighth expected (on a new label) later this year. Given the quality of the music and performances on this disc, one looks forward to seeing what they will offer us next.

**Joshua Cohen**