



## ŪA ENSELADA IBÉRICA

### PROGRAMME NOTES

#### **1. OF GOD AND MAN**

##### **I. A minino tam bonito – *What a beautiful boy***

Mosteiro de Santa Cruz de Coimbra (c. 1650)

This is the piece which gives our ensemble its name. It is a *villancico de negro*, a devotional musical and theatrical genre in which the main characters are African. The text imitates of the Creole spoken by African slave communities in the Iberian world in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, making these pieces very important historical documents. In this *villancico*, a festive group from Angola and São Tomé arrives at the Nativity Crib. Their leader sings verses of great tenderness and joy to baby Jesus, announcing the good he will bring to Humanity. However, her companions are making such a noise that she scolds and even insults them, saying “Mas que bando de surunyo!” (“What a bunch of starlings!”). Her irritation, however, is short-lived and the group carries on merrily with the celebration.

##### **II. Ai mi Dios que causa há sido – *Oh my God, what is the cause***

Pedro de Cristo (1545/50 – 1618)

This piece, probably written for Easter, asks a theological question: why do you (Jesus) suffer cold and pain. The answer is simple: It all happens for love.

##### **III. Ai camaradita – *Oh, comrade***

Mosteiro de Santa Cruz de Coimbra (c. 1650)

This duet was probably written for lent. A friend invites another to a Celestial inn where all suffering and sin is healed and where there is a metaphorical banquet In which, even on days of fasting, you can eat meat.

##### **IV. Todo quanto pudo dar – *All he could give us***

Francisco Guerrero (1528-1599)

This work was composed for the celebration of the Blessed Sacrament and describes in a poetic way, as is usual in Iberian religious *vilancicos*, central themes of Christian theology and devotion: the human incarnation of God, his sacrifice as a gift to humanity, and transubstantiation in communion.

## **2. OF WOMEN**

### **V. Que me queréis, caballero?** – *What do you want from me, sir*

Cancioneiro do Palácio (Espanha, séc. XVI)

A woman resists the advances of a man, saying that she is h married and describing the qualities of her husband and the happiness of their marriage. However, something happens: she commits a "madness" and "takes revenge on herself"...

### **VI. Clamabat autem mulier cananea** – *Motet of the Woman from Canaan*

Pedro Escobar (c. 1465 - c. 1535)

Based on the Gospel of Matthew this motet tells the story of a woman from Canaan who asks Jesus to heal her demon-possessed daughter. Jesus refuses saying he was sent only to save the "lost sheep of the House of Israel". The woman insists, pleading and worshipping Jesus who, acknowledging her great faith, agrees, in the end, to heal her daughter.

This motet was prescribed by Gil Vicente, one of the pioneers of Iberian theatre, to be sung at the end of his play *Auto da Cananea*, in 1534. It was known at the time as the "prince of motets".

### **VII. Mirad que negro Amor** – *Behold this dark Love*

Cancioneiro de Elvas (Portugal, séc. XVI)

A woman recovers after suffering from love, with sadness and anger. Recovering her dignity and self-esteem, she speaks with pride and irony to Cupid (also called Love), who is now nothing more than a ragged beggar.

### **VIII. La mas luzida belleza** – *The most dazzling beauty*

Mosteiro de Santa Cruz de Coimbra (c. 1650)

This piece compares the eyes and the hair of the beloved woman to the rays of the sun and to the stars. But beware: her fire burns.

### **IX. Salió Flora a coger flores** – *Out went Flora, picking flowers*

Mosteiro de Santa Cruz de Coimbra (c. 1650)

In this work, a woman, Flora, is portrayed in two contrasting settings. In the first she is picking flowers in April, a symbol of her youth and vitality. The second, depicts her in her old age, telling the flowers of the brevity of life. At the end we hear the first stanza again, now a nostalgic but tender memory of youth gone by.

### **3. DEVOTION AND ELOQUENCE**

#### **X. Antoniya, Falciquiya, Gazipá – Antonia, Francisca, Gaspar**

Filipe da Madre de Deus (ca.1630 - ca.1687)

In this *vilancico de negro*, composed for Christmas, a troupe of Africans goes to Bethlehem to celebrate the birth of the baby Jesus. However, they overdo their celebration (especially the wine), and all fall asleep instead of continuing their journey. A woman in the group startles from sleep and wakes up her companions, saying she has a bad headache. They wake up in a very bad mood and call her lazy, among other insults. Outraged, she says that she is a noble woman with blue blood and that they are the ones who are lazy, and explains that they are all going to Bethlehem to sing and dance for the baby Jesus.

Once at the crib, a choir of angels sings that manna is raining on the child. One of the men from the group says that he doesn't care because he is not interested in water, only wine. Meanwhile, the Magi arrive - among them an African, King Caspar - with a shining star to guide them. Another member of the group says that they are bringing many barrels of wine to celebrate, and that the brightness of the star is like lightning that makes his head hurt. Finally, despite the excesses of the celebration, everything ends with beautiful singing.

#### **XI. La bomba – The pump**

Ensalada a 4 – Mateo Flecha (1481-1553)

*La bomba* is a theatrical musical satire. Written for Christmas, it describes with ingenious irony how when people are in a complicated situation they are very quick to make the most elaborate promises, but, when all is better, they quickly forget about them.

This is metaphorically described as a shipwreck and is divided into 6 sections:

##### **1. The shipwreck**

The piece begins by describing (poetically and musically) the chaos of the sailors trying to save the ship and themselves (“pump the water out! Hold the sails! Hold the rudder! Block up the leaks!”...) However, the sailors see that the ship is lost and that they will probably die (“Oh, what shall we do? Hold on to the barrels and planks! I will die because I can’t swim”...).

##### **2. The promises**

Seeing that the ship will sink, the sailors start to make promises. At first, they think this is quite reasonable (“I will pray at the proper times”) but soon it turns into a competition to see who makes the most exaggerated promise (“I will walk bare-foot to Santiago de Compostela! I will walk all the way to Jerusalem!”). Next the sailors appeal to all the saints they can think of (The Virgin of Loreto, Saint Genesius, Saint Elmo, Our Lady of Monserrate, etc...).

##### **3. The rescue**

Finally, a ship comes along and saves them. They give thanks to God for having saved them: “Gratias agamus Dominus Deo nostrum”

##### **4. The celebration**

Now safe on the ship that rescued them, the sailors decide to celebrate. One of them has the guitar and they ask him to play something, and they will sing along. However, the instrument is really out of tune and takes a while to correct. After some difficulties, the guitar is ready to play, and they sing a song of celebration dedicated to Jesus and to Christmas day.

### **5. The departure**

All is now well, and the rescue ship sets sail again. The sailors bless the wind that now carries them to safety.

### **6. The false promises**

The *ensalada* now tells us that the only thing the sailors do, now that they are safe, is light some candles, forgetting all the promises they had made.

### **7. The farewell and moral**

The *ensalada* ends with the sailors saying farewell to the audience followed by a moral in Latin: “as there are dangers at sea, there are also dangers on land, especially those that are false.”

