

THE MUSICAL SIDE OF JUAN DEL ENCINA

BY

SUE A. MOORE

Submitted with the assistance of
Dr. Clyde W. Brockett at
Christopher Newport College,
Newport News, Va.

*Awarded First Prize in
Student Paper Competition
1979*

OUTLINE

Thesis: Juan del Encina, generally known as the father of the Spanish stage, also made significant contributions to the secular song literature of the Spanish Renaissance, particularly in the villancico genre.

Introduction: The political and intellectual environment in which Juan del Encina lived and worked.

I. A personal and biographical sketch of Encina

- A. The details of his birth and family background
- B. Encina's educational background
- C. His years in the service of the church
- D. A summary of Encina's personality

II. The Palace Songbook

- A. The importance of the songbook
- B. Encina's place in the songbook

III. The villancico

- A. Early definitions and classifications
- B. Present-day classification
- C. Themes found in the villancico

IV. The musical style of Encina in his villancicos

- A. His following of the trends of the time
- B. The registration (voicing)
- C. Encina's use of the modes
- D. Rhythm in Encina's villancicos

Conclusion: Encina as a composer in his own right.

Juan del Encina, the flamboyant man of the Renaissance, has long been revered as the patriarch of Spanish drama. He lived in a time that was ideal for the cultivation of genius. The reign of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castilla (1474-1516) transformed a fragmented Spain into a united and powerful nation. Queen Isabella was an enthusiastic patroness of the arts, encouraging the performance of both sacred and secular music in her court. A renewed interest in classical literature had spread like wildfire from Italy to the rest of Europe. With the Spanish acquisition of Naples, this burst of intellectual curiosity reached Spain.

The year 1492 can rightly be called a landmark in Spanish history. The last stronghold of the Moors was occupied at Granada, and Columbus discovered America. It was at Christmas of this year that Juan del Encina presented the first of his plays, or "eclogues" as he called them. Thus, the seed was planted for the "Golden Age" of Spanish drama, an era of literary creativity that few nations have ever seen. Although the literary contributions of Encina are monumental, the other side of his genius has long been overlooked: that of his role as musician and composer. Encina composed an abundance of secular songs, primarily villancicos, which he often employed in his eclogues. He is the most prolific composer of the Cancionero Musical de Palacio or Palace Songbook, a highly valued and

studied anthology of early Spanish music.¹ This alone seems to indicate his importance as a musician.

The details of the life of Juan del Encina (sometimes spelled Enzina) are somewhat shadowy. Due to a lack of documentary evidence, the exact date and place of birth, as well as the date of death, are subjects of controversy. Encina has provided some clues on these issues in his own writings. In his 'Tribagia o Via Sagra de Hierusalem', an account of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1519, he gives his age as fifty-one.² In one of his eclogues, he tells us that he was born at a village called Encinas, near Salamanca.³

¹A non-musical study of the Cancionero Musical de Palacio was made by Francisco Asenjo Barbieri in the Cancionero musical de los siglos XV y XVI. Madrid, 1890. For a study containing the music, see Higinio Anglés, La musica en la corte de los Reyes Católicos: Cancionero musical de Palacio. Vol. V e X: Monumentos de la musica española. Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1947.

²Gilbert Chase, "Juan del Encina: Poet and Musician" in Music and Letters, 1939, p. 421.

³For a differing view, see Henry W. Sullivan, Juan del Encina (Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1976), pp. 20-21. Sullivan states that Encina may have been born on June 12, 1468, in Salamanca.

3

Not until 1921 did Juan del Encina's family background become known, resulting from research at the Salamanca Cathedral.⁴ It was there established that Encina was the son of a shoemaker named Juan de Fermoselle (a Galician or Portuguese spelling of the Castillian name Hermosilla). It is believed that Encina was his mother's maiden name. The aspiring young man took up this name in about his twentieth year, possibly because it suggests nobility. The word "encina", which in Spanish means "live oak", also has literary connotations, as it was believed by Vergil, Encina's favorite poet, to be the sacred tree of Jupiter.⁵

However mysterious his family background may be, it is clear that the young Encina received sound educational training for his time. In 1484 he became a chorister at Salamanca Cathedral, attending the University of Salamanca between that year and 1490. During this time he read Latin under the famed Renaissance master of that language Antonio de Nebrija (or Lebrixa), whom Encina revered as his mentor. It was during this time that he became acquainted with the works of Vergil, which were later to serve as the model for many of his eclogues. His musical training was presumably undertaken by his brother, Diego de Fermoselle, a professor of music at Salamanca (which

⁴The discoverer of this information, Ricardo Espinosa Maeso, published his findings in the December, 1929 issue of the Boletín de la Real Academia Española under the title "Nuevos datos biográficos de Juan del Encina".

⁵Chase, p. 423.

incidentally, can boast the institution of the world's oldest University chair of music). As the time of the musical printing press had not yet arrived, Juan probably received most of his musical knowledge through his involvement at the cathedral.⁶

In 1490, Encina was promoted to capellán de coro of the cathedral, and in 1492 became a member of the household of the second Duke of Alba, at Alba de Tormes. Serving as master of ceremonies, he produced a number of mystery plays, the first of these being the aforementioned Christmas eclogue of 1492. The time spent under this noble patronage proved to be Encina's richest creative period; he himself testifies that the greatest portion of his music and poetry dated from 1492-1498.⁷

Encina competed unsuccessfully for the lofty position of choirmaster of the Salamanca Cathedral in 1498, and by 1500 he was in Rome in the service of Pope Alexander VI. He obviously fell into the good grace of the papacy, for he obtained a papal bull which granted him the coveted post at Salamanca. Upon returning to Spain, however, he became involved in a lengthy lawsuit with Lucas Fernandez, the incumbent choirmaster.

⁶Sullivan, p. 127.

⁷Federico Sainz de Robles, "Juan del Encina" in Diccionario de la Literatura, 4th ed. Vol. II: Escritores españoles e hispanoamericanos (Madrid: Aguilar, 1973), p. 363.

The results of this court battle are unknown, nevertheless, he was appointed archdeacon and canon at Málaga in 1509. Between 1512 and 1518 Encina made three more trips to Rome, which ultimately won him the priorate of León in 1519. He then took full orders, celebrating his first mass during the aforementioned journey to the Holy Land. He presumably died in León, no later than March of 1530.⁸

The details of Encina's life seem to paint a portrait of an ambitious, extroverted social climber. During the years spent under the Duke of Alba's patronage, he played the role of the romantic troubadour. During the latter part of his life, he virtually abandoned his art, using papal influence in his advancement up the ladder of social position. It is curious that despite his lengthy involvement with the church, he never composed any known sacred music.

Although the poetic and dramatic works of Juan del Encina have been known for centuries, the bulk of his musical compositions remained undiscovered until 1870, with the discovery of the Cancionero Musical de Palacio, or Palace Songbook. Found by Gregorio Villaamil at the Royal Palace in Madrid, this anthology has brought to light most of the known compositions by Encina, and proved to be an invaluable aid in the understanding of music of the Spanish Renaissance.

⁸Chase, p. 425.

The Palace Songbook is monumental in its importance for several basic reasons. In volume, it outnumbers all other known collections of its time, as it contains 458 musical pieces.⁹ In terms of historical range, the collection also outdistances its counterparts. Using the historical references in the text as guidelines, the pieces have been dated from the 1430's to the early sixteenth century.¹⁰ The anthology also holds importance as being the most representative of all the *cancioneros* (songbooks). Every major peninsular composer of the epoch is represented, including some Italian composers, as well as the Renaissance giant Josquin des Prez. The literary quality of the Palace Songbook further enhances its value, as many major Spanish poets are included, such as the Marqués de Santillana, and Jorge Manrique.¹¹

⁹In its original form, the Palace Songbook contained approximately 550 items, of which some were lost. In extant form, it exceeds the Cancionero Musical de la Casa de Medinaceli (c. 1560) by 60 items. The Cancionero de la Biblioteca Colombina (probably before 1490) contains around 95 items, and the Cancionero de Upsala (1556) contains only 54 items.

¹⁰Robert Stevenson, Spanish Music in the Age of Columbus (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), p. 250.

¹¹Selections with text by the Marqués de Santillana include "Harto de tanta porfía" (CMP, no. 26), and "Señora qual soy venido" (CMP, no. 52). Jorge Manrique is represented by "Justa fué mi perdición" (CMP, no. 42).

The importance of Encina, or at least the familiarity of his contemporaries with his music, can be noted by examining the number of his compositions in the Palace Songbook. Originally, he was represented by seventy-five compositions, of which only sixty-three remain. Of the text themselves, forty-four are attributed to Encina, with some of these being set by other composers. Thus, there are three times more compositions by Encina than any other composer, which leads to the assumption that the Palace Songbook may have been compiled for the House of Alba.¹²

Of Encina's contributions to the Palace Songbook, there is a wide variety of forms, including pastoral dialogues, canciones, romances, and villancicos. The most prevalent form, the villancico, is difficult to define. Literally, the word denotes a rustic or pastoral song (from the Spanish word "villano", meaning a villager or commoner). As a poetic form, the villancico was derived from a Spanish-Arabic verse type called a "zajal" (or zejel), in which the refrain came at the beginning, and was repeated after every stanza.¹³

¹²Gustave Reese, Music in the Renaissance, rev. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1959), pp. 582-583. Also, see William Edward Havens, Versification and Form in the Villancicos of Juan del Encina (Thesis: University of Kentucky, 1972), p. 11.

¹³Chase, p. 426.

The original indexer of the Palace Songbook labels everything in Spanish having an initial refrain as a "villancico". He also lists a Spanish song with any repetition in it as a "villancico", which adds to the confusion. In fact, according to the indexer, and Spanish song not a romance is a villancico.¹⁴

Juan Díaz Rengifo, in his treatise of 1592 entitled Arte Poetica Española, supplies us with an idea as to the form of the villancico when he describes it as poetry composed only to be sung, having both a "head" and "feet". The head consists of two, three, or four verses. The feet comprise a six-verse stanza, which presents a variant of the sentence in the head.¹⁵ The villancicos of Encina, although composed one-hundred years before the treatise, usually fall into this form. In his own writings, however, Encina speaks of the villancico not as an entire composition, but as simply the introductory lines (or what would be the "head" of the piece).¹⁶

¹⁴The romance is basically a literary type. Its theme was usually based on folklore, and it never contained a refrain. Only the first four lines were set to music. For a more detailed discussion of the romance, see Gilbert Chase, The Music of Spain, 2nd ed. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1959), pp. 44-47.

¹⁵For the verbatim quotation of Díaz Rengifo, see Sister Mary St. Amour, A Study of the Villancico up to Lope de Vega (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1940), pp. 2 and 3. The quotation is translated by Eleanor A. Russell, in Villancicos and other Secular Polyphonic Music of Juan Vásquez: A Courtly Tradition in Spain's Siglo del Oro (Dissertation: The University of Southern California, 1970), pp. 114 and 149.

¹⁶Sister Mary St. Amour, pp. 2 and 3.

The present-day classification of the villancicos when applied to the Palace Songbook is to call all Spanish songs with initial refrains villancicos. Of these villancicos, there are two basic types: the "classic-type" villancico with the spill-over rhyme scheme, and those in which the text and music are in alignment with each other.¹⁷ The majority of Encina's villancicos are in the classical style, and in fact, his use of the spill-over rhyme scheme may have been his largest contribution to villancico literature. Composers dated after Encina followed this rhyme scheme usage, suggesting his influence as a composer.

The majority of themes found in the villancico are those based on courtly love, depicting the trials and tribulations of the love-lorn. Other villancicos are occasional, being written for performance at fiestas or religious holidays. Some have historical significance, commemorating a battle or expressing sorrow over the death of a dignitary or loved one.¹⁸ The mood of the pieces range from the serious and melancholic, to the humorous and even indecent.

¹⁷Stevenson, p. 252.

¹⁸For a thorough discussion of themes in the villancico, see Antonio Sánchez Romeralo, El Villancico (Estudios Sobre La Lirica Popular En Los Siglos XV y XVI) (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, S. A., 1969), pp. 55-84.

The musical style of Juan del Encina in his villancicos conforms with the Spanish trends in secular vocal composition of the time. While most European composers were occupied in displaying the florid, refined contrapuntal style of the Flemish school, the Spaniards were concerned with clarity of expression, subordination of the music to the text, and the true meaning of the words. This resulted in a lyrical, chordal style of writing, with clear-cut musical phrases. This emphasis on words seems to have been particularly attractive to the poetical mind of Encina, however, he did show occasional Flemish influence with contrapuntal and canonical imitation.¹⁹ An example of this imitative style is found in "Pelayo tan buen Esfuerzo" (CMP, no. 428), which begins with imitation in the vocal lines, only to lapse immediately into the chordal, homophonic style.

With regard to registration, thirty of Encina's compositions were written for three voices, while thirty-two call for four voices. The treble is always the leading voice. He keeps his vocal lines comfortably within the limitations of the human voice, and the melodies are smooth and flowing. In actual performance, the singers performed "a cappella"; occasionally, the instruments doubled the vocal parts. Sometimes, the treble was sung by a soloist with the remaining parts performed instrumentally.²⁰ This was probably done to produce a sorrowful or a dramatic effect.

¹⁹Sullivan, p. 132.

²⁰Ibid., p. 134.

Encina set the majority of his villancicos in the Dorian mode and its cognate, the Aeolian.²¹ An example set in the Dorian mode is one of his better-known pieces, "Oy comamos y bebamos" (CMP, no. 174), which plays upon the mirthful theme, "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die". Of a more serious nature is the courtly "Pues que jamás olvidaros" (As My Heart Can Never Forget Thee), (CMP, no. 30). Set in the F Ionian mode, it has grave and melancholic undertones.

Encina kept with the fashions of his time in that he shunned the Phrygian and Hypophrygian modes. The Spanish theorist Bartólome Ramos de Pareja, writing before 1482, claimed that the stars influenced the modes, with Mercury controlling the Hypophrygian mode. If this were true, the Hypophrygian would be appropriate for texts depicting fickleness or sudden twists of fate. This type of theme is used in the text of the six villancicos that Encina set in the Hypophrygian mode.²² An example is the lively "Romerico, tú que vienes" (CMP, no. 369),²³ in which the poet, anxiously questions his friend for news of his lover, who has been unjustly separated from him. The flowing, modal style of Encina is often reminiscent of Gregorian chant. In fact, one instance has been discovered of his borrowing of a chant for use as a cantus firmus in the villancico "Mortal tristura me dieron" (CMP, no. 44).²⁴

²¹Stevenson, p. 263.

²²Ibid., p. 264.

²³Ibid., p. 265.

²⁴Ibid., p. 268, footnote no. 170.

Rhythm also plays an important role in the villancicos of Encina. It stands to reason that if the villancico inherited the poetic form of the Arabic "zajal", it also inherited the Arabic rhythms. Encina favors cut-time in the majority of his pieces, however, he also uses triple meter quite frequently.²⁵ Of these pieces, he uses $\frac{3}{2}$ only once, with the remainder of the triple meter pieces being in $\frac{3}{4}$ or $\frac{3}{8}$. He matches the slower beat with the more serious texts, giving the fastest beat to the more frivolous texts. Encina shifts meter in mid-song in only four pieces. An example is "Caldero y llave madona" (CMP, no. 249), which changes briefly from $\frac{3}{2}$ to common time.

From his life and works, we see that Juan del Encina contributed much to both the literary and musical world. Few others in history have shone so brilliantly in two artistic disciplines. There is a curious duality in his nature in that, although he was a man of the cloth, he chose to write secular, rather than religious works. His legacy lies in the secularization of the Spanish stage, as well as in his admirable contributions to the literature of the Spanish secular song, particularly the villancico.

In his musical writing, he basically clung to the fashions of his day, giving his works a unique, personal flavor. Great care was taken in matching the music to the words and mood of the text. His villancicos served as a model for the later composers, especially with his use of the "spill-over" rhythm pattern.

²⁵Stevenson, p. 262.

His villancicos provide us with a window into the picturesque world of Renaissance Spain, drawing us closer to the colorful life of the peasant, as well as the courtly, gallant way of the troubadour.

With the discovery of the Palace Songbook, the villancicos of Encina are experiencing their own "rebirth" in this century. Ironically, although his eclogues have been known for centuries, it is his music, and not his dramatic works, that is being increasingly performed by internationally known ensembles, and in American universities. It seems likely that as a composer, Juan del Encina will become known not only as a precursor of, but also as a contributor to, the artistic excellence of a veritable "Golden Age" in Spain.

SOURCES CONSULTED

- Anglés, Higinio. La musica en la corte de los Reyes Católicos: Cancionero Musical de Palacio. Vol. V: Monumentos de la musica española. Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1947.
- _____. La musica en la corte de los Reyes Católicos: Cancionero Musical de Palacio. Vol. X: Monumentos de la musica española. Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1947.
- Chase, Gilbert. "Juan del Encina: Poet and Musician." Music and Letters, XX (1939), p. 420.
- _____. The Music of Spain, 2nd rev. ed. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1959, pp.36-50.
- Havens, William Edward. Versification and Form in the Villancicos of Juan del Encina. Thesis, The University of Kentucky, 1972.
- Livermore, Ann. "The Spanish Dramatists and Their Use of Music." Music and Letters, XXV (1944), p. 140.
- Reese, Gustave. Music in the Renaissance, rev. ed. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1959, pp. 575-587.
- Russell, Eleanor Ann. Villancicos and other Secular Polyphonic Music of Juan Vázquez: A Courtly Tradition in Spain's Siglo de Oro. Dissertation, The University of Southern California, 1970. pp. 114, 146-158.
- St. Amour, Sister Mary Paulina. A Study of the Villancico up to Lope de Vega. Washington, D. C., The Catholic University Press, 1940. pp. 1-45.
- Sainz de Robles, Federico. "Juan del Encina." Diccionario de la Literatura, 4th ed. Vol. II: Escritores españoles e hispanoamericanos. Madrid: Aguilar, 1973, p. 363.
- Sanchez Romeralo, Antonio. El Villancico (Estudios Sobre la Lírica Popular en los Siglos XV y XVI). Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1969.
- Stevenson, Robert. Spanish Music in the Age of Columbus. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960. pp. 201-272.
- Sullivan, Henry W. Juan del Encina. Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1976.
- Trend, J. B. "Juan del Encina." Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 5th ed., Eric Blom, ed. New York: St. Martins Press, 1954, p. 943.
- _____. The Music of Spanish History. England: Oxford University Press, 1926. pp. 120-141.

