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**MUSIC TEACHING IN NEW MEXICO IN THE
SEVENTEENTH CENTURY**

The Beginnings
of Music Education in the United States

Although historians of American music have unani-
mously proclaimed Boston as the cradle of American music
and music education, such statements have been made only
through ignorance of facts established by existing Spanish
historical documents which give that honor to New Mexico.
It has merely seemed logical, since writers of United States
history trace all movements westward from the Atlantic
coast, to assume that music education should have followed
the same general direction. Such an assumption, however,
disregards the fact that the Spaniards began the conquest
of North America a century before the English; that the
Spanish frontier had been pushed northward from Mexico
City to beyond the Rio Grande before the Pilgrims landed;
and that music was employed, on no small scale, by the
Spaniards as a means of conquest.

While the Spaniards were musical people, it was not
the personal tastes of the conquistadores which determined
the attention given to music in North America in the 16th
and 17th centuries. The first missionaries who landed at
Vera Cruz in 1523 found that music was one of the most
direct and effective means by which the Indians could be
induced to accept the semblances of Christianity and civil-
ization. By 1527 Pedro de Gante had established in Mex-
ico City a school which gave special attention to the train-
ing of musicians. In this institution, especially during the
next half century, singers and players of many instruments
were prepared to serve the church in its missionary ef-

forts.¹ Prayers were taught to the natives set to some familiar chant; orchestras were employed to add charm to the services; and song and dance were encouraged as diversions among the people.

As the mission work spread beyond the Valley of Mexico, schools, monasteries, and churches continued to further the efforts of church officials to teach the natives music. In this they had the united support of the king and the Council of the Indies. In response to petitions of the missionaries, Charles V wrote the provincial of the Franciscans in Mexico City in 1540 to send out, to those best fitted to use them, singers and players of reed instruments "because with music they will be able to attract the Indians . . . more quickly to a knowledge of our Holy Faith."² In 1573 a decree was passed directing the authorities in Mexico to employ music of singer and instruments for the purpose of "soothing, pacifying, and influencing" the Indians who were indisposed to accept peacefully Catholicism and Spanish rule.³ This was especially applicable to the Indians of northern Mexico who, being wandering tribes, had to be attracted to mission life before there could be hope of educating them along any line.

Five years before Charles V authorized the sending of singers and musicians to take part in the conquest, news had come to the viceroy of Mexico of a wonderland far to the north. Thither Fray Marcos de Niza wended his way, only to return with still more glowing accounts. To secure this region for the Spanish king, Coronado was sent north in 1540 with an army of followers. Up the west coast and the Yaqui River, then across the Gila, and northwards they traveled in quest of the Great Quivira, but it was only a lure; Quivira was not found. Instead, Indian

1. Spell, L., "The first teacher of European music in North America," in *Catholic Historical Quarterly*, New Series, II, (Oct. 1922) 372-373.

2. *Fragmentos de la Crónica de la Provincia de Franciscanos de Santiago de Xalisco*, Tomo I. In *Colección de Documentos para la Historia de Mexico*, reunidas y publicados por el Lic. Eufemio Mendoza (Mexico, 1871), 333-334.

3. *Recopilación de Leyes de los Reynos de las Indias* (Madrid, 1681), Lib. I, tit. I, ley iiiii.

towns of thatched huts, or the homes of the pueblo dwellers, met the disappointed gaze of the Spaniards who had come in search of gold, jewels, and a great civilization. After two years of search for the dream city, all returned to Mexico except a few priests who were permitted but a short lease on life before meeting the certain doom which awaited a European among the Indians of New Mexico. Among the victims was Juan de Padilla, who only a few years before had been active in training Indian singers on the western frontier.⁴

During the next half century it seemed that New Mexico was almost forgotten except by some few adventurers and missionaries. But by the time the outlying missions had reached the Conchos River in Chihuahua, Oñate, a conquistador, braved the unoccupied regions beyond and entered New Mexico. With him went, at the king's expense, a band of friars supplied with bells and musical instruments; these Franciscans were scattered among the Pueblo Indians as soon as the towns were reduced to submission. Their efforts at pacification were but a repetition of those of the first missionaries in the Valley of Mexico, but due to the difference in type of the Indians with whom they labored in New Mexico, the results were neither so rapid nor so remarkable.

As far as available records show, the first music teacher who worked within the confines of the present United States was a Mexican, Cristóbal de Quiñones, who belonged to the Franciscan order. He probably entered New Mexico as a member of Oñate's colony between 1598 and 1604,⁵ for Vetancurt tells us that before his death in 1609, he had learned the language of the Queres Indians; erected the church and monastery at San Felipe, installed an organ in the chapel there, and taught many of the natives

4. Tello, Antonio, *Libro Segundo de la Crónica Miscelanea* (Guadalajara, 1891), 204. Also *Fragmentos*, 59; and Beaumont, Pablo de, *Crónica de la Provincia de los Santos Apóstoles S. Pedro y S. Pablo de Michoacán* (Mexico, 1873), III, 503-4.

5. Benavides, Alonso. *The Memorial of Fray Alonso de Benavides 1630* (Chicago, 1916), 198. Notes by F. W. Hodge.

so successfully that they were skilled singers of the church services.⁶ At the time that Jamestown was founded, and thirteen years before the Pilgrims set fort on the Massachusetts coast, New Mexico could not only boast of a music teacher who had enjoyed the benefits of a musical education such as the church schools of that day afforded, but was in possession of an organ.

The next music teacher of record in New Mexico is Bernardo de Marta, a Spaniard who came to America about 1600. He was sent to New México in 1605. One of the old chroniclers tells us that "he was a great musician and was called the organist of the skies; he taught many of the natives in various towns to play and sing."⁷ This work he continued until his death in Zia, September 18, 1635.

Among the other teachers of music in New Mexico, Friar García de San Francisco y Zúñiga deserves especial mention. He was in New Mexico by 1630, for in that year he was left in charge of the church and monastery which his companion, Antonio de Arteaga, founded at Senecú. In this church, an organ was installed by Friar García.⁸ In December, 1659, he founded the mission of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe at El Paso, of which the chapel was dedicated in 1668. At this mission Friar García remained until after 1671. He died and was buried at Senecú in 1673.⁹ While no direct statement has been found that Friar García had an organ in this church, or that he engaged in music teaching while at the El Paso mission, his evident interest in the music of the church, as shown by the installation of the organ at Senecú, suggests that he did no less for the mission which he served for over ten years.

The most famous of the missionaries to New Mexico was Alonso de Benavides, whose memorial to the king of

6. Vetancurt, Agustin de, *Menológico Franciscano* (Mexico, 1698), 43.

7. *Ibid.*, 103.

8. Vetancurt *Teatro Mexicano, Crónica*, pt. 4, trat. 3, cap. xxviii, 98.

9. *Ibid.*: Hughes, A., "The Beginnings of Spanish Settlements in the El Paso District," in *University of California Publications in History*, I, no 3, 306-309.

See also notes to Ayer's translation of the Benavides *Memorial*, 205.

Spain in 1630 gives the best existing account of the province at that time.¹⁰ Santa Fe was still the only Spanish settlement. There were friars working in twenty-five missions which served ninety pueblos comprising some 60,000 Indians. At each mission a school similar in type to that of Pedro de Gante was maintained — here the Indians were taught reading, writing, manual arts, singing and instrumental music. Monasteries had been established among the various tribes. In connection with each monastery there was always a school in which music was taught; sometimes special music schools were maintained.

Among the Piros three monasteries had been founded; one at Senecú—evidently that supplied with an organ by Friar García, one at Pilabó, and one at Sevilleta. Each of these had under its charge the neighboring pueblos. In the monasteries the friars taught singing, reading and writing, with insistence that the Indians live in civilized fashion.¹¹ Among the Tiwas, there were two monasteries, at San Francisco de Sandia and at San Antonio de Isleta. "At these," Benavides says, "there are schools of reading and writing, singing, and playing all instruments."¹² These monasteries and their chapels were especially costly and beautiful. In the monastery of the Pecos district the Indians were well trained in all the crafts, in reading, writing, singing, and instrument playing.¹³ In connection with the conversion of the Navajo Apaches, the use of bells, trumpets, and clarions is mentioned. Benavides comments here on the success of the missionaries as music teachers, "for it is [a thing for which] to praise the Lord to see in so little time so many chapels with the organ-chant."¹⁴

Benavides himself commenced the church and monas-

10. Benavides, Alonso, *The Memorial of Fray Alonso de Benavides 1630* (Chicago, 1916). Translated by Mrs. Ayer.

11. *Ibid.*, 17-19.

12. *Ibid.*, 19-20

13. *Ibid.*, 21-22

14. *Ibid.*, 67. Cf. Benj. Read's translation in his *History of New Mexico*, pp. 695 and 708. He translates **canto de órgano* as "singing with organ accompaniment." Even the Ayer translation might be improved here.

tery at Santa Fe in 1622. Of the latter he tells us that in 1629 the "Religious teach Spaniards and Indians to read and write, to play [instruments] and sing . . ." As evidence of the progress wrought by Christian teachings, he says:

. . . and the boys and girls who always come morning and evening to the Doctrine, attend with very great care [and] without fail; and the choristers in the chapels change about by their weeks [week by week], and sing every day in the church, at their hours, the Morning Mass, High Mass, and Vespers, with great punctuality.¹⁵

From such evidence it seems safe to conclude that there were schools in New Mexico before 1630 in which music was taught. As in central Mexico, probably more attention was given to music than to any other subject of the curriculum; at any rate it is reasonable to believe that as regards the instruments taught and the general importance of music in the curriculum of the monastic schools, the schools of New Mexico did not differ materially from other schools of the era concerning which there is extant a greater wealth of data.

Much of the history of New Mexico after 1630 is still unwritten, but various items gleaned from miscellaneous unpublished documents throw some light on the progress of the work of the church in connection with music. In reporting on conditions in New Mexico, Juan Prado, a Franciscan, states that the Indians were taught to sing with such success that it was indeed marvellous to find so many "bands of musicians to sing with the organ" and the services in such small churches performed with so much care and devotion.¹⁶

But trouble was already brewing in the province. The governors and the representatives of the church were not

15. *Ibid.*, 23 and 32.

16. Testimony of Juan Prado before the Inquisition, Sept. 26, 1633, in *Historical Documents relating to New Mexico, Nueva Vizcaya, and Approaches thereto, to 1773*. (Collected by Adolph F. A. Bandelier and Fanny Bandelier. Edited by C. W. Hackett. Washington, 1923), II. *In press*.

in accord: and, as time passed, the dissensions increased. The poor Indians bore the brunt of the trouble. In their ignorance, they knew not which master to obey, but found it impossible to serve both. As a result, the efforts of the missionaries in the educational field were continually hampered by orders of the governors; the Spaniards were forced to side with one or the other faction. As early as 1639 the cabildo of Santa Fe complained to the viceroy of Mexico of the conduct of the religious, charging that they were appropriating church funds to their own uses. The report proceeds:

The same thing occurs in other things that are given for the divine worship in the church of this town, for they say that an altar ornament, an organ, and other things have been given, but they are not there.¹⁷

So the breach widened as the years passed, until the power of the Inquisition was called to the aid of the missionaries, and the governor of the province, Bernardo de Mendizabal (1657-1661), was impeached and taken to Mexico City for trial. In the evidence introduced, he was accused by the friars of having encouraged the Indians in the continuance of their worship of idols and other forms of heathenism, such as dancing the Catzinas — a dance pronounced indecent by the church, but which Mendizabal characterized as harmless and innocent. He was also accused of preventing the singing of mass by having, on one occasion, ordered that the singers who were sent from Cuarac to the Humanas to sing for a special festival should be given fifty lashes each; the natural result being that no more singers would officiate for fear of receiving a similar punishment. All of these charges Mendizabal denied on the witness stand; he asserted that the churches had all the volunteer singers they could use; and that, in addition to a singer and a sacristan, there was also an organist

17. Report of the cabildo of Santa Fe to the viceroy, Feb. 21, 1639, in Hackett, *His. Docs.* II.

wherever there was an organ. All such persons were excused from both tribute and labor, by order of the royal *audiencia*. He proceeded to say that when he reached Santa Fe and found no organ in the church there — a condition he found very improper — he advised the church authorities that, if the instrument was not too expensive, he would pay the expense of bringing one there; in any case that he would bear half of the expense. Much evidence was presented by both sides, but before a verdict was reached, Mendizabal died.¹⁸

Another document setting forth the grievances of the missionaries and some of the accusations against them throws some light on the means sometimes employed in securing funds for the purchase of musical instruments.

Another charge is brought against us, it being said that in some places the Religious receive a few antelope skins in exchange for sustenance or for the crop; we do not deny this charge, as they call it, but indeed it is in very few places that this occurs, and where it happens it is done for the purpose of obtaining for the value of the skins certain ornaments, trumpets, and organs. For one hundred and fifty pesos a year are not sufficient for this as we have to buy wine, wax, incense, and other things, nor would it be fitting, since we can obtain these extra things by this means, for us to insist that everything should be given to us by his Majesty, who is in such need. The same kind of calumny is current this year, for God is good enough to allow certain pine nuts to grow in the forests of five or six towns in this country, and the minister is accustomed to ask his parishioners to gather some of them for the churches, giving them abundant sustenance while they are doing this. From the pine nuts which are gathered and sent to Mexico the proceeds are given to God, for instance recently there was bought a fine organ for the convent of Abó . . . "

From succeeding events it seems that other governors continued to regard the missionaries as enemies, and to

18. Hackett, *His. Docs.*, II. *In press.*

19. Letter of the father custodio and definadores of New Mexico to the Viceroy of New Spain, Nov. 11, 1659. In Hackett, *His. Docs.*, II.

breed all the trouble possible. The Indians were weary of the friction between the governing forces; perhaps they were weary of being governed at all. Uprisings were frequent, and each became increasingly dangerous to the few Spaniards and missionaries scattered over a vast extent of territory and protected by but few troops. Requests were made to the viceroy for reinforcements, but before any action was taken by the never-too-speedy government in Mexico City — it was too late. By a pre-arranged plan, the natives rose in rebellion in 1680, killed many Spanish settlers and friars, burned their homes, missions, monasteries and churches, and drove those who survived down the Rio Grande. Fifty years of friction between the state and church had brought its reward. The Indians were temporarily free once more from both.

During the last two decades of the seventeenth century the Spaniards attempted to regain control of New Mexico, but their efforts were not crowned with the success which had marked their occupation of the country a century before. For us, the only interest is in the monasteries which survived the rebellion. Among these were Senecú, Alamillo, Sevilleta, Isleta, Alameda, Puray, and Sandia. To these the ever hopeful missionaries returned to take up anew the work of conversion and civilization. Music teaching was continued, but, as the power of Spain declined, there was not the money to carry on the work as widely as had been the case when Spain was at her height. Fewer teachers could be detailed to give musical instruction, and fewer musical instruments were shipped from the capital.

Still, the earlier efforts are worthy of notice. Through them European music was introduced into the United States. The first European music teacher and the first organ ever seen north of the Rio Grande were to be found in New Mexico. Before 1630, many schools were in operation which included music in their curriculum. The first

boy-choirs within the present United States were those which supplied the music for the mission churches of New Mexico. Churches and monasteries were supplied with organs which were transported overland from Mexico City, a six months trip in those days. A century before Boston claims to have had an organ (1713) there were many organs in the "great unknown North," as the Spaniards termed the land of the Pueblos. As far as Spanish dominion extended, there was music. And as in no other respect did Spain leave her impress more indelibly on the life of the people whom she governed, so it seems unlikely that the music of the natives could have escaped from being affected to some extent by the music of the Spaniards which had for them such a great fascination. It may be that closer study of the music of the Indians of New Mexico will reveal many traces of the music of the Spaniards who were their first European teachers. For a love of music was a characteristic alike of the conquered Aztec, the treacherous Apache, the ceremony-loving Pueblo, and the European Spaniard who was their master thru three centuries.

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