

The romances preserved in the sixteenth-century vihuela publications provide a practical and convenient way to study the development of this genre during the Spanish Renaissance. Like much of the music found in the vihuela publications, the romances were an integral part of Spanish secular art. The romances, as well as other popular Spanish secular forms such as the villancico and the soneto, were adapted extensively during the middle of the sixteenth century. Spanish composers took these ancient genres and turned them into stylized art for consumption by court officials. Romance texts were preserved in *romanceros* but without any music. The music preserved in the sixteenth century comes in two forms, polyphonic and monophonic settings. Polyphonic settings of the romance texts appear in the Spanish *Cancioneros* while monophonic versions survive in the vihuela publications. The romance, like the villancico and soneto, were important poetic forms which over time incorporated music in their performances. The vihuela romances are not recreations of the original romance, instead they are new adaptations of the romance designed for court performances and public distribution through print. The romances found in the vihuela books are not complete settings, instead they are snapshots of interpretations and possible performances of these works.

History of the Romance

The romance dates back to medieval Spain in the early fourteenth century. It was a public art, performed by Castilian troubadours and *juglares* in village squares. These early romances were anonymous, surviving as an oral tradition, evolving with each generation. They were not only an important part of Spanish culture, but Moslem and Sephardic cultures as well. The romances told stories of great knights and warriors, tales of love, and epics of religious quests. The combination of music and poetry provided a colorful venue for all that attended.

The romance texts covered many topics and drew from several sources. The romances did not tell complete stories like the epic poems did. Instead, they concentrated on individual events or scenes, making them considerably shorter than epic poems. Sometimes the romance would offer a detailed narrative for the story, providing some background to the events taking place. Other times, they would be a dynamic series of dialogues, possibly capturing moments from stories that were already well known. The romances served a historical purpose, informing the audience of current events or recounting a famous battle from the fifteenth century between the Christians and the Moors. Many romances grew out of fictional events or drew from other European cultures. Several romances written during the sixteenth focused on biblical themes or scenes from classical Antiquity. The diverse subjects and flexibility of form made the romance an ideal vehicle for telling stories.

Musical Sources:

The romance survived via an oral tradition, but by the middle of the fifteenth century and certainly during the sixteenth, the romance texts were written down and published, providing us with a glimpse of this interesting art form. Most of the romances survive in text form only. Much of the music survives in the Spanish Cancioneros or vihuela publications. The romances preserved in the vihuela publications are listed below:

Milán, Luis. *Libro de música de vihuela de mano intitulado el Maestro*. Valencia, 1536.

Narváez Luis de. *Los seys libros del Delphin de música de cifras para tañer vihuela*. Valladolid, 1538.

Mudarra, Alonso. *Tres libros de música en cifras para vihuela*. Seville, 1546.

Valderrábano, Enríquez de. *Libro de música de vihuela, intitulado Silva de sirenas. En el qual se hallara toda diversidad de musica*. Valladolid, 1547.

Pisador, Diego. *Libro de música de vihuela*. Salamanca, 1552.

Fuenllana, Miguel de. *Libro de música para vihuela intitulado Orphenica lyra*. Seville, 1554.

Daza, Esteban. *Libro de música en cifras para vihuela intitulado El Parnasso*. Valladolid, 1576.

As popular as the romances were, their numbers in musical sources are few when compared to other secular forms such as the villancico.¹ It is possible that the romances in these sources are not attempts at preserving all that existed, but merely the popular ones. The romance, like so many other popular forms, transcended from a street venue to the Spanish courts, where they were highly favored. These romances were often referred to as *romances viejos* (old romances) implying an old and noble tradition. Poets were so inspired by the romance texts, that several composed new romances in imitation of the old style. Musicians took the popular romance melodies and composed polyphonic songs for several voices or solo songs with vihuela accompaniment. In these settings, the composer only printed one or two stanzas of the text since their audiences were already familiar with the stories. It is possible that when performing a romance in a court setting, one need not perform the entire romance. Instead, a musician would perform a shortened version of the romance, almost like a tribute or synopsis of the entire tale.

The romance melodies are simple and straightforward. The range is usually within a sixth and has a stepwise contour. Romance melodies are short, usually consisting of ten to twelve notes. The romance texts are usually set syllabically and consist of dozens of stanzas. It is difficult to imagine the same melody being sung for every line of a romance text and common sense suggests that a great deal of improvisation went into the performance of a romance. The design of the melodies is flexible enough to accommodate a great deal of improvisation and

¹ Within the seven vihuela publications, there are 21 romances, 40 canciones, 47 sonetos, and 79 villancicos.

variation. Romances such as “Conde Claros” contain an implied bass pattern that instrumentalists immediately used to construct variation sets. Nearly every Spanish instrumental composer published a set of variations on “Conde Claros.” In any sense, romances were quite unique in that they existed in many forms.

The Romance Intabulations

The romances published by the vihuelists represent an important part of the romance repertory. The vihuelists were not concerned with intabulating every romance, only favorite or popular ones. This is true for other vocal works such as the villancico, where a particular song is intabulated by several vihuelists. The nature and characteristics of the romance settings differ among the vihuelists. Naturally, personal preference is a factor, but the settings also change according to the period in which they were composed. There is a clear distinction in how the romances (and other vocal genres) were treated by the vihuelists during the first half of the sixteenth century and the last half. Vihuelists from the first part of the century tend to favor instrumental variation while the later vihuelists favored vocal variation.

Luis Milán’s *El Maestro* contains four romances. His romances represent a fine balance between vocal and instrumental improvisation. The vocal lines are short melodic phrases with a narrow range while the vihuela part provides a harmonic foundation for the melody. Milán balances the voice and vihuela by adding vihuela *redobles* between melodic phrases. This layout adds variety to romance and creates a sense of motion in the song. Milán provides clear instructions for the performances of the romance as seen at the beginning of “Con pavor recordó

el moro”: “The *consonancias* (chords) slow and the *redobles* (running passages) at the end where the voices finishes very fast.”²

Con pavor recordó el moro

Luis Milán

5

Con pa - vor re - cor - dó el mo - ro
No de - xan - do co - sa á vi - da

10

15

y em - pe - có
de quan - to

This formula is fairly consistent except in “Triste estava” where the *redobles* take place on the long notes of the vocal parts. However, Milán also provides the voice part with instructions: “Very slow. The singer should *garganta* (improvise) when the vihuela does not make *redobles*.”³ In this romance, Milán desires an interchange between the voice and vihuela ornamentation.

² .” Luis Milán, *Libro de música de vihuela de mano intitulado el Maestro* (Genève: Minkoff Reprint, 1975), f. H i.

³ Milán, *Libro de música*, f. H ii.

issues mostly by example than explanations. In the opening passages of the eighth book, Cerone stresses the importance of vocal ornamentation: “Because the composer...did not concern himself with anything but arranging [the notes] according to acceptable harmonic progression, [the] singer must adorn them according to the character of the lyrics.”⁴ Cerone provides several examples of the different types of ornaments according to the type of passage, which are best explained by musical example:

Cerone's Suggested Diminutions from *El melopeo y maestro* (excerpt)

Easy elementary examples for novices in glossing



The procedure Cerone uses resembles many of the instrumental treatises from the time. Charles Jacobs points out that Cerone’s book is largely modeled from Lodovico Zacconi’s *Prattica di Musica* (Venice, 1592). While Jacob’s points out the importance of Cerone’s work, he fails to see the significance of the Italian influence. Given the type of music found in the vihuela publications (fantasias, pavanés, galliards, and Italian songs) and that the vihuela was essentially an Italian instrument, it is no surprise to discover the strong influence of Italian music and performance practice had on Spanish music. While Cerone’s book does not offer the same detail that a treatise on ornamentation does, the examples clearly show that vocal ornamentation in Spanish music followed similar rules to the Italians.

The art of playing *consonancias* is almost as simple as it sounds. It is important to note that this is a homophonic process since all notes must sound together. A composer adds a bass

⁴ Pietro Cerone, *El melopeo: tratado de musica theorica y practica* (Bologna: Forni Editore, 1969), pg. 541.

line to the melody and then fills in the inner voices, making sure that the vertical sonorities are satisfactory. However, how does a composer choose which intervals are appropriate for this process. The earliest published description of adding consonances is Fray Tomás de Sancta Maria's *Libro llamado arte de tañer fantasia* (1565). Sancta Maria lays out the process of adding consonances early in part II of his treatise: "It must be known that any consonance, whether in three, four, or more voices, is counted from the bass to the treble, which our the outer voices, because the middle voices, tenor and alto, are used for the accompanying consonances and fill the space between the outer parts."⁵ A large part of Sancta Maria's treatise is devoted to providing the performer with guidelines to appropriate intervals to place above the bass note, paying close attention to the motion of the treble line. As strict as Sancta Maria's process seems, it is actually a very practical system for harmonizing melodies.

Milán is one of the only vihuelists to use a monophonic style in romance settings. The vihuelists after Milán apply more contrapuntal techniques modeled after composers like Josquin when setting the romance, resulting in a different texture and form. The polyphonic nature of these later settings often makes it difficult to distinguish between original settings and intabulated ones. In some cases, a vocal model exists to clarify this issue, but not always. However, a better understanding of a vihuelist's personal style offers some insight to the process. The way romances were set by the vihuelists also reflects the changing approach of instrumental music in Spain.

The romances by Narváez and Mudarra allude to the monophonic style established by Milán. While they add polyphonic lines in the vihuela parts to the romance melody, they often

⁵ Thomas de Sancta Maria, *Libro llamado arte de tañer fantasia* (Genève: Minkoff Reprint, 1975), f. 13v.

display a sense of balance between the voice and vihuela. The polyphony is not as complex as later vihuelists and there is still a strong chordal motion in the songs. Although there is contrapuntal motion, it is difficult to separate the vihuela part into individual voices, implying that the part is more instrumental than vocal. These elements create a different type of setting that bridge the gap between the monophonic and true polyphonic romances.

Narváez only included two romance settings in his publication, both of which share similar traits. Narváez's setting of "Passeábase el rey moro" displays the balance between monophony and polyphony. "Passeábase el rey moro" appears in two other settings by Fuenllana and Pisador, suggesting that this was a popular romance. These other versions share similar melodies, although they are not exact duplicates of each other. The vihuela part provides harmonic motion as well as ornamented passages between phrases. Although the vihuela part is polyphonic, it is certainly not characteristic of the polyphony seen in vocal music and the nature of the lines is very instrumental. Narváez illustrates the possibilities one has when performing this piece on the vihuela. Given the types of descriptions one finds of Narváez's playing style, it is easy to conclude that Narváez is providing one of many improvised possibilities of this romance.

Pas-se-á - - - va - se el rey mo - - - ro

Luis de Narvaez

Pas - se - á - - - va - se el rey mo - - - ro por la ciu - - - dad
Las car - tas e - chó en el fue - - - go y al men - sa - - - je -
11
de Gra - na - - - da, car - tas le fue - ron ve -
ro ma - ta - - - ra; e - chó ma - no a sus ca -

Mudarra's four romances all deal with biblical subjects. "Triste estava el rey David" recounts the David's sorrow over the death of his son while "Israel, mira tus montes" discusses the fall of Saul and Jonathan. Mudarra's romances are perplexing in one respect, they function more as short songs than full length romances. Mudarra uses a technique uncharacteristic of romance settings, he repeats words and sometimes individual phrases as seen in the example below. This shows great sensitivity to the texts, a typical characteristic of Mudarra's vocal settings. Mudarra is not attempting to preserve or capture a moment from a romance, but rather create a new type of romance, once that is suitable for shorter performances and highlights the most important sections of the romance. Mudarra's polyphonic writing is similar to Narváez's on the surface but with much less activity. This sparse vihuela part places more attention on the vocal part.

Triste estava el rey David

Alonso Mudarra

(vihuela in A)

Tris - te es - ta - va el rey Da - vid,
quan - do le vi - nie - ron nue - - - - vas

10 tris - - - te y con gran - pas - - - sión,
de la muer - te de Ab - sa - - - lón.

20 quan - - - do le vi - nie - ron nue - - - - vas
Pa - - - la - bra tris - tes de - zí - - - - a,

30 de la muer - te de Ab - sa - lón,
sa - - - - li - - - das del co - ra - çon,

35 de [Ab] - sa - lón, de Ab - sa - lón, de Ab - sa - - - lón.
del [co] - ra - çon, del co - ra - çon, del co - ra - - - çon.

40

The romances by Valderrábano, Fuenllana, and Pisador draw many of their romances

from pre-existing polyphonic vocal settings. Valderrábano does not indicate if he referred to vocal sources in his settings, but his polyphonic writing certainly implies a vocal model.⁶ Fuenllana and Pisador share similar thoughts regarding intabulations of vocal models. In his introduction to *Orphenica lyra*, Fuenllana stresses that ornaments and *redobles* are unnecessary in vocal transcription: “I do not always embellish previously composed works because in my opinion, such embellishments or ornaments can obscure the validity of the composition”⁷ Pisador shares similar thoughts as well: “I wish for the student to know that in this and everything else in the book, I put great effort and diligence so that it [my music] is true and clear without embellishments to confuse the player”.⁸ Both composers also tend to indicate their vocal source for their intabulations. The polyphonic writing of Pisador and Fuenllana is much more imitative and complex than that of previous vihuelists.

Fuenllana was much more consistent about identifying his vocal models. His intabulation of Morales’s “De Antequera sale el moro” does not have a surviving vocal model but the intabulation clearly shows four distinct parts.

⁶ Judith Etzion concludes that Valderrábano’s romances use similar melodies and contrapuntal techniques to Vasquez, thus implying that Vasquez was the vocal model. I have not personally investigated this claim. See Judith Etzion, “The Spanish Polyphonic Ballad in 16th-Century Vihuela Publications.” *Musica Disciplina* 35 (1981): pg. 195.

⁷ Miguel de Fuenllana, *Libro de música para vihuela intitulado Orphenica lyra* (Genève: Minkoff Reprint, 1981): f. *Auisos*.

⁸ Diego Pisador, *Libro de música de vihuela* (Genève: Minkoff Reprint, 1973): f. *Prólogo al lector prefacio*.

De Antequera sale un moro
(opening)
(four-part setting by Morales)

Miguel de Fuenllana

The same is true for his intabulation of Bernal’s “A las armas moriscote.” Many of Fuenllana’s intabulations draw directly from the vocal works with very few changes, usually occurring at cadences or between phrases.

While many tend to overlook Estaban Daza due to his “amateur” status, it is important to consider his only romance with respect to the ones that preceded it. Daza’s only romance, “Enfermo estava Antioco,” does not share the same level of sophistication as those by Mudarra or Fuenllana, but it does share many features with Milán’s romances. Daza essentially provides consonances to the romance melody, without the flamboyant *redobles* that Milán so carefully added. Perhaps one of the reasons that Daza is often ignored in vihuela studies is that he does not carry the tradition established by Fuenllana and Pisador. Instead, Daza looks back at earlier models for his romances. This type of monophonic setting is seen not only in this romance, but also his ten villancicos. The reason for Daza’s apparent deviation from his contemporaries has

from virtuosic performances and present a more expressive setting of the romance, suitable as a concert song, which is quite different from what the romance was originally conceived. Later vihuelists like Valderrábano and Fuenllana do not concentrate on creating their own works but focus on intabulating three- and four-voice settings of romances by other composers. The reasons for this change are unclear. Perhaps these vihuelists were trying to illustrate the vihuela's potential for playing vocal music. Or they were included as instructional pieces for a student to play. In which case, using familiar works is beneficial since a student can easily determine if they are playing the wrong note.

The vihuela romances reflect the changes that occurred in vocal music as well, that is the stylizing of ancient secular forms to meet the satisfaction of the Spanish courts and to bring these pieces to a more noble position, akin to the Italian madrigal and other popular European forms. The Spanish composers of this period did not seem concerned about preserving the music of the past, instead they concentrated on adapting the music to suit the European ears of the new Spanish courts. As the new Spanish Empire searched for an identity, it drew from its past for inspiration, and transformed the music to reflect the needs of their present culture. The vihuela romances offer a snapshot into the needs of the new Spanish culture.