

Professionalization of Music: Choristers at Missions Santa Clara, 1800-1845, and the Mystery of Mission San Antonio

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A Franciscan sense of identifying Indian musicians in their records of vital statistics began to take hold in many of California's missions in the nineteenth century. Such priestly identification, I argue, reflected a growing sense of professionalization of those who had learned a skill-set sufficiently different from others to warrant their distinctive naming. Thus *músico* became a clerical identifier, joining such previously existing identifiers as *alcalde* (Indian official), sacristan, page, *herrero* (blacksmith), *carpintero* (carpenter), *enfermero* (nurse), and *interprete* (interpreter), to name a few. This phenomenon of professionalizing musicianship has a history that apparently began with the important work of Padre Narciso Durán at Mission San José that in some cases coincided with musical training being done at other missions and in other cases influenced practices adopted by missionaries in response to Durán. This paper will focus on the choristers and choir at Santa Clara and will address the enigma of the lack of professional identification at the most musically sophisticated of all the missions, San Antonio de Padua. Additionally, I will provide relevant comparisons from my earlier work on the choir of Mission San José.ⁱ My essay has been made possible, in part by access to the Huntington Library's Early California Population Program (HECPP) on-line database that links mission-era data on 101,000 baptisms, 27,000 marriages, and 71,000 burials performed by Franciscans in California from the beginning of the mission system in 1769 until California formally entered the United States in 1850.

The Role and Importance of Music in the Missions

Music formed the foundation of mission daily devotional life beginning with the *alabado*, or morning hymn of praise, followed later by the Mass, the Angelus at noontime, opening or closing catechism or recitation of the *doctrina*, men singing to women weaving at the looms, *vaqueros* and fieldworkers singing at their tasks. As William Summers recently wrote, "one simply cannot begin to understand mission life without a careful understanding of music (all idioms) and the power it exercised in shaping *rite, ritual, and spectacle*." He added that in missions "the celebration and enactment of *the central cultural values* [took] place out in the public through these three celebratory vehicles."ⁱⁱ While there have been several studies of mission music in the past, there had been no systematic attempt to assess its role in mission life until I devoted a chapter to the subject in my book *Converting California*.ⁱⁱⁱ In so doing I have opened the proverbial can of worms, so as valuable as Summers insights are, I can only but sketch the importance of music here before turning to a closer look at the social compositions of that most important of musical pageant producers and participants, the choir.

Junípero Serra, first father President of the California Missions and a notable

singer himself, wanted to create choirs, specialized singing groups only for men, to perform devotional music. He met with limited success, as we shall see.

Serra's successors encountered challenges when their charges had to memorize their musical parts without being able to follow a priestly musical cue. Padre Durán, afflicted with the gift of perfect pitch that permitted him to detect error readily, found it necessary to save his own ears by trying something new at his Mission San José. At first he thought that Indians could not make church music. Then he heard singers from nearby Mission Santa Clara sing beautifully; Padre Viader had taught them. Durán sent some of his would-be singers to Viader for instruction and found himself so pleased with the result that he committed himself to gaining similar results on his own. Durán taught his singers to play instruments and in so doing found that if a chorister became ill or died, the whole Mass was no longer thrown into a shambles because the others could cover and move the singing along. Durán recorded his thoughts on teaching music in 1812^{iv} and his ideas influenced others and coincided with the work being done at Missions Santa Clara and San Antonio de Padua.^v

We know from several sources that mission choirs ranged in size from thirty to forty members, depending upon the size of the mission Indian population. Where possible priests dressed their choristers in distinctive garb to differentiate them from other Indians and assigned them to work that kept them close to the priests. Choristers bonded to each other and to missionaries since they regularly practiced twice a day and performed at least once a day during the Mass. Choristers had a privileged place, a specific social geography within the church in which they practiced and performed, a space dedicated to them and usually in a loft in the back overlooking the congregation. Identity as a chorister conferred special status on an individual based upon his skill at replicating European sound in music and in playing European musical instruments, including flute, violin, mandolin, cello, guitar, clarinet, trumpet, French horn, triangle, drums, tambourine, barrel organ^{vi} and the important collateral music of bell ringing.

Musicians at Mission Santa Clara

I have chosen to examine the choristers identified in the Huntington Early California Population Project database at Mission Santa Clara, Durán's neighboring mission that had been founded in 1777, twenty years before Mission San José. I wanted to see how Viader's practice of identifying choristers in the mission records compared to Durán's.

Indian people who became choristers entered into the mission registers through two primary routes: one was the role of godparent at baptisms, and the other was by being a witness at a marriage. A third route involved death records, searching for miscellaneous attributes and specifying music as a value; this approach only worked for those who died before 1850. Many Indians lived beyond California's incorporation into the U.S., and their deaths are not recorded in these registers. The time frame for Santa Clara was between 1800 and 1845 and proved comparable to the period from 1798 to 1843 for Mission San José. Five choristers could be identified from Mission Santa Clara

compared to twenty-two at Mission San José. The reason for that may lie in the late recognition by Viader and his co-religionist Magin Catalá that identifying a witness's occupation might have been a useful statistic for them to keep in the same way that it was to note that information for godparents begun in the eighteenth century. Due to Catalá's poor health, Viader had to handle the duties of nearly two priests^{vii} and so his inconsistency in noting occupational data is understandable. His erraticism in this area should be seen as a product of stress rather than outright refusal to make the notation. Nonetheless, identifying witnesses' occupations seems to have been a nineteenth-century decision.^{viii}

Four of the five choristers were baptized as children at age 5 or less and only one as an adult. None had been born at the mission. All were of what I call O, or ordinary, status, meaning that their godparent (*padrino*) was another Indian neophyte. If the *padrino* had been a member of the *gente de razón* and if that role was performed while neophytes were performing it as well, then I infer that the baptized Indian would have been of H, or high, status within his/her Indian community. No such high-status Indians were recorded at Santa Clara.

Curiously, the choristers were not recorded as having served as marriage witnesses, and they acted as *padrinos* a total of seventeen times, and 94 percent of those were performed by two men, Hortulano ten times and Mariano six. Three of these men married, but there is no record of offspring. Nor is there any record of their wives participating in the spiritual life of the mission by acting as either witness or godmother. Twenty-year-old Bernabe married a twelve-year-old woman in 1827, and two years later she was recorded as having died and then been buried or cremated in the Tulares, the Central San Joaquin valley. The records do not reveal whether she was there on pass from the mission or if she had run away.^{ix} In 1821, seventeen-year-old Macario married sixteen-year-old Gabriela. He lived eight more years and she, twelve. She had a previous husband, named Bernardo, about whom the records are silent.^x Mariano, at age twenty-seven, married twelve-year-old Taciana in 1810. She had been married once before, eighteen months earlier. Mariano died thirty-five years after his marriage to Taciana, but there is no burial record for her, suggesting that she lived beyond 1850.

While the choristers at Santa Clara were not as active in the mission's spiritual life as they were at Mission San José, three of the five did participate at least once constituting 60 percent of this group as opposed to 32 percent of the twenty-two choristers at Durán's mission. Choristers at Mission Santa Clara lived an average of twenty-four years in the mission compound, contributing their voices and actions to the building of a community there.

Musicians at Mission San José

At San José, musicians performed the function of witness fourteen times from 1823 to 1834; altogether, the choristers officiated in 110 baptisms. Of the 520 baptisms for which an occupation of the godparent was given, choristers (112) were second only to sacristans (177), and accounted for 22 percent of all such *padrinos*.^{xi}

Choristers proved important to Franciscans in building a mission community at San José. Their appearance as witnesses at marriages suggests that they also sang during those services, reinforcing the meaning and value of Christian family through sacred song. As *padrinos*, the choristers/musicians touched the lives of individuals receiving baptism, whose spiritual life subsequently would be fostered by the godparents.

Musicians played a key role in influencing the mission community, both directly and indirectly, through their wives. Choristers, therefore, who did not serve in the religious ceremonies of baptism or matrimony except as singers, had wives who extended the reach of music by the examples of their status, into countless mission families.

Perhaps the most remarkable chorister, because of her gender, was Yocitaye, an Indian woman baptized as Gaudiosa at the age of 3 on June 27, 1811. She lived only fourteen more years and was buried at the mission, but at age fifteen she had married one Cayetano, a widower, on July 17, 1823. She apparently had no children. I designated Gaudiosa as being of ordinary social status because she had an Indian godparent. Gaudiosa is, however, the only woman chorister I have found identified in my study of missions to date. Clearly, she proved to have had a remarkable voice that priests would have heard from other public devotional music involving congregational singing. William Summers has pointed out that local conditions could prompt priests to deviate from the Serra-prescribed norms by permitting women to be choristers. In the instance of Gaudiosa he wrote, "I wonder if the exceptional woman in this case is the tip of an iceberg or an exemplification of the 'rule'?"^{xii}

Finally, choristers at Mission San José, the largest mission in northern California, should be noted for their longevity. Of the twenty-two choristers, twelve, or over half their number, were buried at the mission, their lives ranging from the low of thirteen years to the high of forty-two years, with an average lifetime of twenty-one years. This means that on average a priest could count on a generation of musical contribution from a chorister in the mission in providing continuity and training for new musicians and the development of complex musical programs for the Mass and on Holy Days.

The matrimonial status of mission choristers at San José proved puzzling. Ten choristers, or 45 percent of the total, could be identified as having been married, five through establishing their matrimonial record and five by inference, meaning that they were identified in four cases as a spouse and in one as a father and may have married at other missions.

Summary

What does this preliminary inquiry into musicians/choristers at Missions Santa Clara and San José tell us? What do we learn from the HECPP database that was unknown before or made clearer by this program? We can see the developing professionalization of music through the designation of singer and musical instrument player as *músico* in the records and that development can be seen over roughly twenty

years, from the mid-1810s to the eve of secularization. The numbers enumerated are smaller than the traditionally given figures of from twenty to thirty choristers per mission. San José, with its large neophyte population, identified only twenty-two and Santa Clara only five. Either mission choirs were smaller than previously thought, which seems unlikely, or there is a significant problem in underreporting. Given the recent increasing evidence for more sophisticated and intricate musical performance in California missions than previously imagined,^{xiii} even the larger figures for the total number of men and boys in any mission choir might be too low.

A possible explanation for this observed difference revolves around Durán's desire to professionalize the choirs through teaching them to play musical instruments. It would be likely, then, that those people entered the mission registers as *músicos*, the professionals who primarily did this work/art, while other singers who were used to augment the choir for Sundays, Holy Days, and other important spiritual events passed unrecorded in that role. Even at Mission San José, both Durán and his fellow Franciscan Buenaventura Fortuny enfolded musicians Narciso and Miguel Francisco with their other occupations, page (*paje*) and Indian official nurse (*alcalde enfermero*) for Narciso and page for Miguel Francisco when entering their occupations in the death register. In other missions, where Franciscans may not have been as diligent as Durán and Fortuny in recording all the occupations an individual may have practiced in the mission, chorister/musicians doubtless passed unidentified if a priest thought that the person's primary role, if even that, was all that should be noted.

The HECCP database permits insight into differences between those who entered the missions as adults and became choristers as opposed to those born into the mission or inducted as small children. Twenty-three percent of the sample were baptized as adults, meaning that older Indians could join the choir if they could carry a European tune well. While 45 percent of the group apparently came from high-status Indian families at Mission San José, more than half of the choristers there did not, meaning that a path opened to achieve high status within the mission independent of one's birth status in his, or her, native community. By examining the occupations of all witnesses and godparents, we can see that choristers also entered a privileged social/spiritual world of other Indians closely linked to the priests—the other professionals. Here we find Indians assisting in the sacraments of Baptism and Matrimony who filled the role of Indian official (*alcalde*), sacristan (responsible for maintaining the church's sacristy and bell ringing), and interpreter (*ynterprete*). In short, choristers constituted an elite group within an elite tier that surrounded the missionaries with whom they daily interacted. Every day, through their singing and often through their service as witnesses and godparents and as exemplars of the new order, they affected the lives of hundreds of Indians at each mission. While underreporting of choristers was a problem throughout the mission, nowhere was this problem more significant than at San Antonio.

Mission San Antonio de Padua

Mission San Antonio de Padua is the most curious case of all the missions, one in which the music itself, much of it recovered by Craig Russell, is the best source for what

happened there. Mission records at San Antonio are eerily silent about those who performed what was doubtless the finest and most intricate European music heard in Alta California. This cannot be dismissed as an oversight or indifference on the part of the mission padres, since just two Mallorcan Franciscans, the incredibly important Juan Sancho and his co frère Pedro Cabot, both music zealots, together presided over the flowering of this musical experience.

In 1814, they wrote to their superiors concerning Indian music performance in their mission. These Franciscans thought that their neophytes had “a lot of musical talent” and that they played “violins, cello, flutes, horn, drum and other instruments that the Mission has given them.” The priests wrote that the Indians sang “Spanish lyrics perfectly, and they easily learn every kind of singing that is taught to them.” Indians could “successfully perform as a choir, or even pull off the singing of a polyphonic Mass with separate, independent melodic lines. . . . In all this they are aided by a clear voice and good ear that they all have, both men and women alike.”^{xiv}

Craig Russell has deduced from this report that Mission San Antonio had “a full Classical Period orchestra that could handle anything in the modern style (*estilo moderno*) of Haydn or Mozart and their equivalents in the Spanish Empire of Francisco Corselli, Ignacio de Jerusalem, and Francisco Delgado.”^{xv} As more and more musical materials are being discovered in diverse places bearing the handwriting of Sancho, it becomes progressively clearer that musical performance in Mission San Antonio rivaled the best in Spain.^{xvi}

If San Antonio’s mission choir could perform music from the simplest plainchant to the most complex and sophisticated polyphonic music of that age, then why did not Padres Sancho and Cabot record their chorister/musicians in their mission records? It cannot be that the priests found their musicians unprofessional. The sheer amount of practice required to perform the finest music would qualify anyone who could do it as a professional. Were the priests indifferent to such a designation? No. The answer must lie in the music performance, suggesting that Sancho and Cabot probably used women in their choir. In their 1814 report they described “both men and women alike” as possessing a good ear and clear voice. Recalling the anomaly/practice of *Gaudiosa* at San José, it seems possible that the missionaries at San Antonio chose to omit all references to *músicos* in their documents. Stranger still, they omitted reference to any occupation whatsoever concerning neophytes in their church records. This was no oversight as with Viader. No. It was deliberate. Only they knew why they kept silent about the members of the finest orchestra in Alta California; and they left the question of identifying these choristers up to us to answer. Although an enigma, the Mission San Antonio orchestra and choir represented the apex of classical and modern Spanish music performed not in Seville, or Barcelona, or Palma de Mallorca but in California’s Mission San Antonio, on the furthest, most desolate outpost of Spain’s North American frontier.

I wish to make one final observation concerning the importance of the evidence developed by musicologists in trying to discern the history of early California music. Craig Russell’s analysis of the types of musical instruments employed at Mission San

Antonio de Padua led him to conclude that Padres Sancho and Cabot had a full-fledged Classical-period orchestra there. This evidence argues for the existence of a sizeable choir that deliberately went unreported by those two priests. Additionally, Margaret Caywood's study of musical life at Mission Santa Clara tells us that by 1811 Padre Viader had assembled the musical instruments needed for another such Classical-period orchestra.^{xvii} Hence, underreporting of professional musicians at Santa Clara is just that, incomplete reference to a complex organization and set of musical performances. Analyses by musicologists join the observations of outside visitors to California's missions telling us that choir size is doubtless of even greater magnitude than had previously been imagined and demands further study of surviving inventories of musical instruments, mission by mission, in our reappraisal of Franciscan introduced music in California.

ⁱ James A. Sandos, "Identity through Music: Choristers at Missions San José and San Juan Bautista, 1798-1843," in Steven Hackel, ed., *Alta California: Peoples in Motion, Identities in Formation, 1769-1850* (San Marino and Berkeley: Huntington Library and University of California Press, forthcoming). I am at work on a history of choirs and choristers for all of the California missions for which records have survived.

ⁱⁱ William John Summers, "Comments on *Converting California*," *Boletín* 21/2 (2004): 66 (emphasis in the original).

ⁱⁱⁱ James Sandos, *Converting California* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004): 128-53. Summers, "Comments on *Converting California*," 65-66, situates my work in context.

^{iv} Narciso Durán, "Prólogo Ad Lectorum," Catholic Church, Liturgy, Ritual, 1812, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California.

^v Guadalupe Vallejo, "Ranch and Mission Days in Alta California," *The Century Magazine* 41/2 (December, 1890): 183-192; Sister Mary Dominic Ray and Joseph H. Engbach, Jr., *Gloria Dei: The Story of California Mission Music* ([Sacramento], 1974): 8-19; Sandos, *Converting California*, 128-53; and Maynard Geiger, *Franciscan Missionaries in Hispanic California, 1769-1848: A Biographical Dictionary* (San Marino, 1969), 19-24.

^{vi} William Summers, "Spanish Music in California, 1769-1840: A Reassessment," *International Musicological Society Report of the Twelfth Congress, Berkeley 1977*, Daniel Hertz and Bonnie Wade, eds. (Basel: The American Musicological Society, 1981), 360-380, especially Appendices II and III. Owen da Silva, *Mission Music of California* (Los Angeles: W.F. Lewis, 1941): 8, presents an incomplete list of instruments used in California missions.

^{vii} Margaret Cayward, *Musical Life at Mission Santa Clara de Asis, 1777-1836* (Santa Clara: Santa Clara University Research Manuscript Series on the Cultural and Natural

History of Santa Clara, No.13, 2006), 5-6. Geiger, *Franciscan Missionaries in Hispanic California*, 42-46, 263-65.

^{viii} At San José, witnesses were identified from 1823-34.

^{ix} Mission Santa Clara (SCL) marriage (mat) # 02290, and burial (bur) #06522. Her baptized name was María Trinidad.

^x SCL mat # 01960, and bur # 06894 for Gabriela.

^{xi} The occupation listing may be incomplete since priests frequently entered a name without noting occupation. Thus, while San José mission baptisms show fifty-nine entries for page as an occupation for godparent, that figure misleads because from January 1, 1809 to May 3, 1825, Luis Gonzaga acted as godfather 364 times, but his occupation was given as page on only fifty-nine occasions.

^{xii} Personal communication from William Summers.

^{xiii} Sandos, *Converting California*, 131-42.

^{xiv} Sancho and Cabot translated by and quoted in Russell, "Juan Bautista Sancho," 183.

^{xv} Russell, "Juan Bautista Sancho," 184.

^{xvi} *Ibid.*, 186-97. See also William J. Summers, "Sancho, Alta California's Preeminent Musician," in *J.B. Sancho, Pioneer Composer of California*, Antoni Pizá, ed. (Palma: Mallorca, 2007), 68-90, especially Table 4A-C enumerating work that Sancho brought with him or wrote while in California.

^{xvii} Russell, "Juan Bautista Sancho," 184. Margaret Cayward, *Musical Life at Mission Santa Clara de Asis, 1777-1836*, 5.