

Music Associated with Santiago and the Pilgrimage: 1500 to the Present



Albrecht Dürer, Dudelsackspieler. Woodblock print.

It becomes ever more difficult to associate specific music with Santiago and the pilgrimage with each passing century after 1500. The Protestant Reformation and its reaction in the Counterreformation of the Roman church, the increasingly cosmopolitan musical culture of Europe, and the steady decline in the numbers of pilgrims making the trek to Santiago de Compostela all played a role. The homogenization of world musical culture began with the widespread availability of printed musical scores beginning in the late 17th century, and it accelerated in the 20th century thanks to the phonograph and the technologies which followed. A small number of Masses and other works were composed in the 16th and 17th centuries honoring St. James the Greater, but the flowering of classical music in the late 18th and 19th centuries left few pieces one can associate in any direct way with the Camino, Santiago, or even St. James more generally.¹ There are few popular works with Camino associations, at least in the sound archives of recorded music. Some late 20th century compositions are linked to the Camino and the pilgrimage, but recent compositions with Camino associations have been evanescent. For those reasons, this essay will discuss musical works, religious, vernacular and popular, from the beginning of the 16th century to the present that might have been heard by pilgrims along the Camino in Spain. It is not limited to works specifically associated with the Camino or St. James the Greater, for there are few of those to examine.

We must remember that until the twentieth century, European musical culture was conservative, and many of the works from earlier years continued to be played or sung. New works may have driven older ones from the core regions to the peripheries of countries and regions, but in the Roman Catholic Church Gregorian chant, with its origins in the 7th century, continued to be a major part of religious services as did the polyphonic works introduced in the medieval era. Depending on the region, the diocese, and the musical resources of the particular cathedral or church, there

developed a somewhat diverse musical culture where contemporary settings of the Mass could be heard in one locale even as much older settings predominated in another. Folk songs from the early eras were sung, played danced to and otherwise enjoyed up to the invention and diffusion of the phonograph and the radio, often alongside newer versions of that same music and new compositions. A pilgrim to Santiago in 1700 probably sang songs, and most certainly heard music in churches, taverns and hostals that would have been familiar to pilgrims in the 15th century or even much earlier. But despite this ever widening musical body, there were few new formal compositions directly associated with the pilgrimage or even with the Saint it honors, and there appears to be a limited addition to the body of folk-created works as well.

From 1492 when Granada was captured by the Catholic monarchs until the lengthy decline of Spain as a European and world power accelerated sometime in the late 1600s, Spain had a remarkable and most influential high culture. Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Velásquez and Tomás Luis de Victoria are but the best known names of the era, and their works continue to be enjoyed even now. The works of these writers, painters, and musicians had influences extending to all of western Europe as well as to the Spanish colonies, in particular to Peru and Mexico, the wealthiest and most sophisticated of those colonies. The culture of Spain was cosmopolitan, and just as the great writers, artists and musicians of Spain became known outside its boundaries, works were acquired from other parts of Europe, and great artists from other countries came to work in Spain. This is most evident in the visual arts and well displayed in the collections of the Prado where the works of El Greco, a Greek who received his artistic training in Italy but spent most of his career in Spain hang beside foreign artists like Rubeens and Spanish painters including Velásquez and Murillo. This cosmopolitan tradition continued well into the 17th and even 18th centuries. The archives of music show a similar set of trades between Spain and its Empire as well as between Spain and the rest of Europe.

The trade began in the medieval period, for medieval and early modern Spain was well connected to the remainder of Europe by dynasty and royal marriage. As a consequence much music was imported into Spain by those who came from abroad with royal entourages, and music composed in Spain was exported through the same channels. When Carlos I (also known as Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, the difference is too confusing to go into here) came to be king, he barely understood Castellano. He was a Hapsburg whose family tongue was German, and he had resided in and was most familiar with the Low Countries. As a consequence, when he came to Spain his court included painters and musicians from Flanders as well as from France, Austria and the Hapsburg lands in Italy. Flanders and Italy were the centers of new religious music in the Renaissance, and it was not long before the renaissance style settings of the Mass were emulated in Spain, reaching a high peak of art in the works of Tomás Luis de Victoria. In later years musicians came from abroad to compose and play secular music for concerts and operas, even as Spaniards went abroad, often to Paris, to train, perform and compose. These peripatetic musicians brought with them the styles, the fashions, and even the instruments from the places where they received their early training, creating cosmopolitan high-culture music in which Spanish high culture music, while retaining some local peculiarities, was but a particular type of more general European high culture music.

Even as musicians like the Italian Domenico Scarlatti were bringing their musical skills to Spain from abroad, and great Spanish musicians like the monk Antonio Soler were creating masterworks at home, Santiago de Compostela and the pilgrimage were receding in importance to Europe and to Spain. Those composers, among with many others, wrote Masses and other works for religious services, but few of those works, and none that are now readily available in recorded form, were devoted to St. James the Greater. Some of this can be attributed to the great upheavals in the Western Church—the Reformation, the Counterreformation and all that followed from them. The Counterreformation Roman Church was the patron for the creation of many works of art, and music was one of the arts it encouraged. Composers wrote magnificent Masses, *te deums*, hymns and motets, some of them in veneration of saints, but James the Greater was rarely the honoree.

With the Counterreformation, other saints took the place of James in the minds and prayers of those who continued to follow the lead of the Pope in Rome, and many saints who were not apostles were honored with masses and hymns. Those Europeans who became Protestants focused their attention on the Apostles whose writings form the core of the New Testament, in particular Matthew, Luke, Mark and John, along with Paul, the other major contributor to the New Testament. A fisherman and probably illiterate, James the Greater may have been a wonderful evangelist, but no sacred texts flowed from his pen. In the Protestant world, James was considered but one of the dozen apostles. His name was remembered in biblical stories, but he was in the background, overshadowed by those who wrote the canonical works. Likewise, the Protestants at first discounted and later positively abjured the veneration of relics like the bones of saints. Among the more radical of the Protestants, especially the Calvinists, the very idea of a pilgrimage to venerate relics was anathema, a sign of despised papism and the erroneous, the evil, ways of the Roman church. Not surprisingly, neither pilgrimage nor music written for it were elements of most Protestant culture.²

While wonderful music was written for use in the Protestant church, especially for the Lutherans, none of it was written in veneration of saints. The Protestant notion that prayers were to go directly to the deity rather than through the intercession of a saint was a key element of the protest that led to the split of the western church. The Protestant religious works were thus directly in praise of the Holy Spirit, God the Father and Jesus, the honoree of most Protestant religious music. Bach wrote his majestic St. Matthew and St. John Passions using as their texts passages from the Bible, a retelling of the passion of Jesus through the words attributed to Matthew and John. Those compositions were not prayers to the evangelists for their intercession with God or celebrations of their lives and works. Matthew and John are important in the Bach passions only because they were witnesses to and recorders of Jesus' life and sufferings.

Even as the number of pilgrims declined, the amount of vernacular and popular music specifically associated with the Camino also declined until all one can do is assign the possibility "it might have been heard along the Camino" to any given piece of music. The evolution of the guitar, the instrument most strongly associated with Spain, led to many compositions, and some of those were most certainly heard in inns and taverns along the Camino. Increasing sophistication of the musical culture was not limited to the elite circles of society and to the church, for some composers wrote works accessible to the public at large, "popular songs." By the end of the 17th century the printing of

music became common, and performance of those printed works could be attempted by anyone with the ability to read music and to play an instrument or to sing. The composer Santiago de Murcia has no direct association with the Camino other than his name, as far as I am aware, and he mostly lived and worked in colonial Mexico, but his music has become emblematic of Spain. I am quite certain virtuoso guitarists playing for coins in taverns along the Camino would have attempted to play some of it, at the very least a version copied after hearing some other guitar player. Musical notation became an international language so that anyone with the ability to play a guitar could play the works of Santiago de Murcia no matter where they lived. Guitarists who could not read music could listen and then copy from those who could.

It should be noted that most of the music we today take as emblematic of Spain is the music of the south. Flamenco, *cante hondo*, and Gitano music are all of southern origin, and like *paella*, *gazpacho* and *sangria* they are fairly recent immigrants to the northern regions the Camino traverses. While all of those comestibles and musical genres are certainly enjoyed in northern Spain today, as they are in many other parts of the world, they are elements of Andalusian culture, a culture as distinct from that of old Castille or Galicia as the Bavarian is from the Prussian in Germany or as a typical Texan is from a New Englander. The idea of a taciturn Basque or Gallego dancing flamenco is about as odd as the idea of a Finn dancing tango. Well, alright, members of all three groups can now be found doing those exotic dances, but it stretches credibility to imagine that their local cultures would have generated the forms!

The music of Andalucía has been integrated into world high musical culture by composers from abroad, including some of the best known like Tchaikovsky, Bizet and Ravel as well as by Spanish composers including de Falla and Albéniz. While much of the music is wonderful to listen to, it is as foreign to the musical traditions of northern Spain as are the folk dances of Austria, Germany and Hungary refined in the works of composers including Haydn, Mozart and Brahms. None of that high culture music was likely to be encountered by the pilgrim to Santiago prior to the invention and diffusion of the phonograph and the radio. The vernacular music of Andalucía would have been about as rarely encountered on the Camino in the 18th century as the vernacular music of Bavaria or Ireland. Any of it might have been heard as a pilgrim from one of those regions sang while walking or played during the evening hours at an inn or an albergue, but it was not the music of the localities through which the Camino passed.

Over the past couple of decades so-called world music has become fashionable, and numerous recordings are available, purportedly representative of the local popular musical traditions in one region or another. Celtic music has been among the most popular of the genres of world music. Some of the world music collections have been compiled by ethnomusicologists and are rigorous in their definition of forms and techniques. The various recordings available from the Smithsonian Institution fall into this category where every effort has been made to collect authentic versions of songs, dances and other compositions, ones played on authentic instruments and sung using the dialect and vocal techniques of the regions of origin. Market forces have driven many commercial world music recordings, and their producers are keenly attuned to present day tastes and demands in the United States and Europe. All Celtic music currently available from such commercial producers tends to sound alike, whether it supposedly originated in Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Brittany or Galicia. As I am neither a

musicologist nor an ethnographer, I am unable to determine whether this is a consequence of actual similarity or a function of market demand for particular kinds of sounds. I must admit some skepticism that such similarities existed a century ago, before the age of recordings and easy travel. It most certainly exists today, but that may be a consequence of reality imitating art. In other words, the world music fad may have created the similarities.

One thing is certain, the Celtic regions, including Galicia, were all at the fringes of European high culture, and like fringe cultural regions everywhere, they tended to be conservative, that is they kept alive traditions no longer vital in the core regions. At one time, as late as the 18th century, bagpipes (*Dudelsack* in German, *cornemuse* in French, *gaita* in Castellano and Galego) were common instruments throughout Europe. The south German artist Albrecht Drürer, whose woodblock print of a bagpipe player illustrates this posting, was familiar with bagpipe music in what is now Germany and northern France. By the mid-19th century bagpipes had all but disappeared in Europe except in the fringe regional cultures of the Celtic lands and Greece. There is nothing particularly Celtic about the bagpipe other than the fact that the Celtic regions kept on using bagpipes long after they were considered passé in the cosmopolitan musical centers of France, Germany, Italy, Austria and England.

Perhaps one should be thankful for the world music movement. No matter how crass and commercial some of its products may be, it is at least preserving a fraction of vernacular musical tradition in the face of immense odds against preservation. The age of the radio and recordings has led to a homogenization of world musical life that is almost frightening to behold. Rare is the region anywhere in the world today that has not heard Elvis, the Beatles, Ray Charles, and any number of less accomplished but at least temporarily popular singers and instrumentalists from the English speaking nations. A few regions, notably the Arabic speaking region, India and China have talent, well-known regionally but not world-famous, who continue to play music in the local vernacular. Even in those areas one is almost as likely to hear a well-known western pop singer, or a wan local imitator of same, as to hear someone singing or playing in the local vernacular and popular styles. In Europe and North America where radios, cassette tape players and more recently CD players and now MP3 players and iPods are almost universally owned consumer products, language is about the only remaining barrier to a unified, indeed a uniform, popular musical culture. During my walks on the Camino I deliberately avoided listening to radio or television, but in bars and restaurants I mostly heard “placeless” music, musical sounds I could have heard in restaurants, cafés or bars just about anywhere. The language of the singer was sometimes a hint that I was in Spain rather than at home or in Japan, Malaysia, Norway or even Argentina, but more than a few of the songs were in sung in English by performers with a world market in mind.³

The typical vocal music now used at Masses in churches is sung in the local language, and much of it dates from after 1960. Vatican II and its wide ranging and quite profound effects on the celebration of the Mass must be mentioned in any discussion of music related to the Camino. With the local language mostly replacing the traditional Latin in both the words of the Mass and in the vocal music performed during the service, much new music was composed for use with services. After over a thousand years in common use, chant has nearly disappeared from religious services, and one is

forced to make special arrangements in order to hear it. The Mass chanted by the small cadre of Swiss monks at Rabanal remains in my memory as the only example of a religious service along the Camino using anything other than contemporary, that is to say 20th century post-Vatican II, vocal music. Special occasions lead to performances of the great Masses of the past, but those are at least as much concerts as they are religious services. Evenings in albergues may have impromptu musical offerings from one or another *peregrino*, but rarely will those singers and instrumentalists include the ancient pilgrimage songs.

Sound recording and broadcasting changed forever the musical culture of all parts of Europe, indeed of the world as a whole. Homogenization is the key term, and today along the Camino one is likely to hear more-or-less the same music one would hear in similar kinds of locations anywhere in the world. At the same time the ancient music of the pilgrimage, some of it preserved through regular and frequent performance for over a millennium, has passed into the status of being heard occasionally in a few places. Mostly the ancient and traditional music of the pilgrimage is now available to us thanks to the work of dedicated musicologists, early music connoisseurs, and fine early music performance groups through their concerts and recordings. The traditional music of pilgrimage is certainly no longer an integral element of daily life along the Camino nor of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.

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1. I am using the term classical music to include all works written for performance by professional musicians, copying the sense it is used in record stores, and not strictly limiting it to those works of the period pigeonholed as classical between early music and Romanticism, *e.g.* the 17th to early 19th centuries.
 2. The Anglican Church in England did retain a tradition of pilgrimage, unlike the Lutherans and Calvinists.
 3. Not all of the music sung in Castellano was from Spain, for several Latin American countries have substantial recording industries, and the United States, including Puerto Rico, is a major producer of vocal music sung in Castellano. It takes an ear more carefully trained than mine to distinguish between the dialects of the various regions of Spain and of the various parts of Latin American in order to determine the origins of music sung in Castellano.