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THE ORIGIN OF CATALAN CHORAL MUSIC AND THE CHOIRMASTER SCHOOL OF MONTSERRAT

History of Catalan Choral Music: Origins to Present Day

Already from the 4th, 5th and 6th centuries, there are reports that liturgical compositions and musical codices existed in the Catalan Visigothic church; a catalogue of masses, prayers and hymns – some with a clear Byzantine influence – which, unfortunately, were not preserved. When Catalonia became a part of the Carolingian Empire, the Roman chant was introduced in its Gregorian form, and Visigothic musical elements from the year 850 onwards disappeared. Between the 9th and 10th centuries, monks from the monasteries of Ripoll, Sant Cugat, Vic, Barcelona, Girona, la Seu d'Urgell and Sant Miquel de Cuixà wrote, copied and disseminated materials that brought about ecclesiastic and liturgical change as they adapted to Roman religious services using so-called 'Catalan notation', which was later – in the late 11th century – substituted for Aquitanian notation. Catalonia came to possess more than 100 Gregorian musical codices. Then, in the 12th century, as the catalogue of musical material increased, it became clear that greater accuracy was needed for writing music and so the stave was introduced.

At the beginning of the 11th century, religious music composed for different vocal parts began to come into use. In 1040, Abbot Oliba of the Ripoll Monastery copied pieces of music for different vocal parts into a codex. These are the oldest documents on polyphonic music to have been conserved in the West.

The consolidation of polyphony into religious music happened from the 13th century onwards. Polyphony in Catalonia mainly consisted of two voice parts over a simple base and elemental harmony, very much related to, and influenced by, French polyphony. Several pieces of medieval music exist from the 14th century. However, the most important one for us today is a codex copied towards the end of that century which is an example of popular religious music: the *Llibre Vermell de Montserrat*. This manuscript heralded the start of

the great Montserrat Monastery Choirmasters; a school which has produced important composers throughout the times, up to the present day, which will be properly introduced in a later section.

It is important to note that during the Renaissance, these composers started to compose madrigals and ensaladas, most of which are lost. Furthermore, although this eventually came to an end, the production of choirmasters continued. The most illustrious composers of these styles are Pere Alberch Vila (1517–1582) and Joan Brudieu (1520–1591) for madrigals, and Mateu Fletxa el Vell (1481–1553), Mateu Fletxa el Jove (1530–1604) and Bartomeu Cárceres (16th century) for ensaladas. In this era, the music that emanated from the court of the Dukes of Calabria in Valencia is especially notable with the production of *Cançoner del duc de Calabria*. In the 16th century, three unique books of polyphonic works were printed in Barcelona: the madrigals of Pere Alberch Vila, the motets by Nicasi Sorita, choirmaster of Tarragona, and the madrigals of Joan Brudieu.

In the Baroque period, attention should be drawn, amongst numerous other composers of religious music, to Lluís Vicenç Gargallo (1636–1682), who composed the first two oratorios of the Iberian Peninsula, Joan Pau Pujol (1570–1626), and Francesc Valls (1671–1747).

The production of operas began in the 18th century, during the classical era. Composers such as Domènec Terradellas (1713–1751), Josep Duran (1726–1802), Carles Baguer (1768–1808) and Ramon Carnicer (1789–1855) were the most noteworthy writers. In the field of religious music, many composers produced substantial material.¹

It is important to note the contribution that Josep Anselm Clavé (1824–1974) made in the 19th century. In addition to creating choral entities, to bring culture to the working classes, he also bequeathed a repertoire for these choirs to sing which, following the tendencies of the time, was written in a popular style, idyllic character, exalted nature and described traditions. Other notable composers from this romantic era are Felip Pedrell (1841–1922), Apel les Mestres (1854–1936), Antoni Nicolau (1858–1933), Isaac Albéniz (1860–1909), Enric Morera (1865–1942), Enric Granados (1867–1916), Lluís

1 Josep Carcoler (1698–1876), Emmanuel Gomina (1712–1792), Francesc Juncà (1742–1833), Jaume Badius (1785–1822), Joan Rossell (1724–1780) and Francesc Andreu (1786–1853).

Millet (1867–1941), Amadeu Vives (1871–1932), Pau Casals (1876–1973), Antoni Pérez Moya (1884–1964), Cristòfol Taltabull (1888–1964), Jesús Capdevila (1891–1982) and Robert Gerhard (1896–1970).

Robert Gerhard connects with the avant-garde movements of the 20th century that produced a number of composers in Catalonia, such as Eduard Toldrà (1865–1962), Joan Lamote de Grignon (1872–1949), Joan Manén (1883–1971), Joan Samper (1888–1966), Joan Gibert (1890–1966), Agustí Grau (1893–1964), Frederic Mompou (1893–1987), Manuel Blancafort (1897–1987) and Ricard Lamote de Grignon (1899–1962).²



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The Escolania of Montserrat and the Choirmaster School of Montserrat

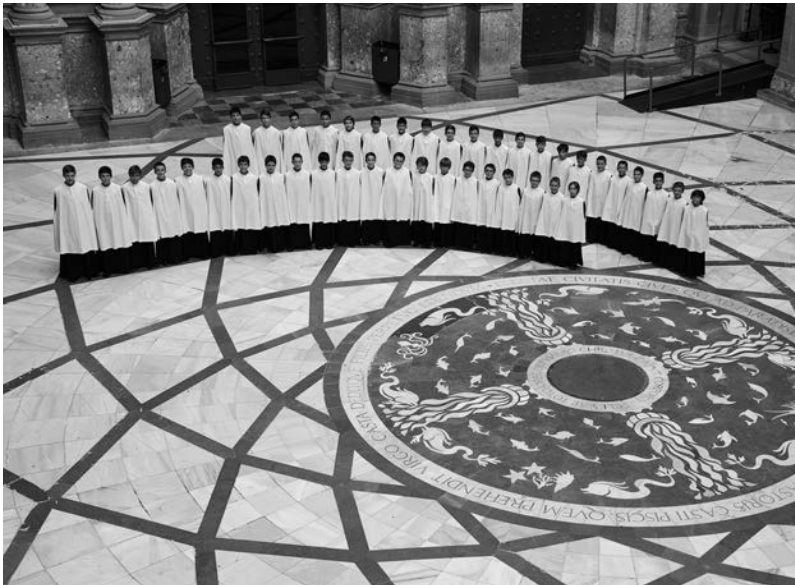
A musical centre that stands out above all others in Catalonia is the Montserrat Benedictine Abbey. The Monastery was formed in 1025, and the presence

2 Amongst many other composers of the 20th century who also have choral works and various harmonisations of traditional and composed songs, some prominent names are Joaquim Homs (1906–2003), Rafael Ferrer (1911–1988), Xavier Montsalvatge (1912–2002), Enric Ribó (1916–1996), Josep Viader (1917–2012), Matilde Salvador (1918–2007), Francesc Vila (1922–2011), Manuel Oltra (1922–2015), Joan Guinjoan (1931–2019), Xavier Benguerel (1931–2010), Narcís Bonet (1933–2019), Jordi Cervelló (*1935), Salvador Pueyo (*1935), Josep Soler (*1935), Josep Prenafeta (1936–2011), Baltasar Bibiloni (*1936), Valentí Miserachs (*1943), Josep Crivillé (1947–2012), Josep Lluís Guzman (1954–2017), Mariona Vila (*1958), Salvador Brotons (*1959), Feliu Gasull (*1959), Agustí Charles (*1960), Albert Guinovart (*1962), Xavier Sans (*1962), Poire Vallvé (*1962), Josep Vila i Casañas (*1966), Jordi Domènech (*1967), Xavier Pastrana (*1967), Ramon Humet (*1968), Xavier Pagès Corella (*1971), Albert Carbonell (*1972), Ferran Cruixent (*1976), Oriol Cruixent (*1976), Josep Ollé (*1987) and Pol Requesens (*1990).

of singing in the religious service is as old as the monastery. The most original institution of the Monastery of Montserrat is the Escolania. The estimated date of its formation is between the years 1200 and 1300. A document of 1307 is conserved that describes its existence.

The Escolania has survived to this day and can be considered the oldest choral school in Europe. Its extraordinary importance has provided us with music, composers and compositions of great value, originating the so-called 'Escola de Montserrat' with choirmasters who, at all times, have kept up to date with the compositional tendencies of the moment and have marked the style of religious music in Catalonia. Following the customs of each era, the songs were accompanied by instruments. Moreover, to play the instruments, they had to train musicians and have good teachers.

Among the compositions, the *Llibre Vermell de Montserrat* (Red Book of Montserrat), which dates from the 14th century, is particularly worthy of praise. Its name comes from the colour of its covers, and it consists of a large number of sermons, prayer exercises and dispositions related to the cult of the Virgin Mary. However, the most significant work produced by the Monastery is the *Cançoner Montserratí*: Ten musical compositions dedicated to the Virgin Mary for pilgrims to sing and dance to during their vigils inside the Montserrat



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Basilica. Eight of the pieces are in Latin, one is in Catalan and another in Occitan. Additionally, they also offer different musical forms: four are written for one voice, two for two voices, two for three voices and two are canons. It is also the only example of sacred dances preserved in Europe.

The first known musician monks are Jeroni Rotés, Jeroni Castell and Joan Graner in the 15th century. The best composers started in the 17th century with Joan Marc (1582–1658), Pere Roca (1610–1651), Jaume Vidal (1606–1689), Dídac Roca, Joan Gelonc (1620–1671), Joan Romanyà (1615–1687), Francesc Rossell (1630–1676), and Joan Baptista Rocabert (1657–1701). However, the best known and most recognised composer is Joan Cererols (1618–1680) who, with an extensive catalogue of works, remains one of the most popular musicians interpreted and had many disciples who were choirmasters of the main churches of the Iberian Peninsula. Miquel Pujol, Joan Garcia, Miguel López (1669–1723) and Benet Soler (1640–1682) from this era should also be mentioned.

Entering the 18th century and the classical period, the first reformist was Josep Antoni Martí (1719–1763). His students, Anselm Viola (1738–1798) and Narcís Casanoves (1747–1799) were the main composers.³

In 1811, during the French war, with the destruction of the Monastery, part of the musical archive – codices and valuable documents – was lost. In the 19th century, Manuel Guzman (1846–1909) is certainly the stand-out composer and, then, in the 20th century, we can note Àngel Rodamilans (1874–1936), Anselm Ferrer (1882–1969), Ireneu Segarra (1917–2005), Gregori Estrada

³ We must also mention Antoni Soler (1729–1783), Josep Vinyals (1772–1825), Benet Brell (1786–1850), Jacint Boada (1772–1859) and Ferran Sors (1778–1839).

(1918–2015) and, more recently, Bernat Vivancos (*1973), who has been both a member and conductor of the Escolania choir.

In the field of musicology, we should point out Gregori Suñol (1879–1946) and David Pujol (1894–1979). Regarding the Escolania, a boys' choir of white voices, it currently

consists of 54 children between 9 and 13 years of age. The purposes of the Escolania today, as in past centuries, are the daily participation in the prayer of the sanctuary, together with the great influx of pilgrims from around the world, and the spread of sacred music.



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The Escolania is an integrated centre of basic and artistic education, recognised by the Department of Education of the Generalitat de Catalunya. In the mornings, the schoolchildren receive general education on all subjects. The afternoon is dedicated to music: rehearsal with the choir, musical language, study of two instru-

ments, orchestra, and so on. Its wide repertoire includes pieces from its own authors – the Escolania is the main diffuser of compositions by the Choirmasters of Montserrat – as well as by composers from all around the world. In fact, they participate in two religious services every day with different repertoire in each occasion.

Since the end of the 1960s, the Escolania has spread beyond the Basilica of Montserrat. It regularly performs concerts in different Catalan communities. Moreover, it has also collaborated with orchestras and participated in opera productions of the Liceu Theatre, the opera house in Barcelona. In recent years, the choir has toured through several European countries, China, and the United States. The Escolania has also received various recognitions and awards, one of the most notable being the *Creu de Sant Jordi of the Generalitat de Catalunya*. The choir has recorded an abundant discography and, in 2008, they opened a YouTube channel.