

La guitarra en Madrid (1750-ca.1808): fuentes y difusión

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Abstract

This study has been completed under the auspices of the Doctoral Research Programme in Musicology at the Complutense University of Madrid and its main aim is to investigate the role of the guitar in Madrid in the second half of the 18th century. In an attempt to be more flexible, the study includes the period that stretches between the end of the Baroque and the first few years of the 19th century, as this is an age of capital importance in the history of the guitar within the Spanish context.

During that time, the guitar was very popular in Spain, especially in the town of Madrid. Unlike the majority of other instruments, its organological and musical features ensured that it permeated into every social class. It was the instrument favoured by the lower classes while, at the same time, was often enjoyed by the aristocracy as well.

A wide range of sources provide evidence that shows how some of the Madrid population found the guitar an ideal musical instrument, not only because it was very effective for accompanying songs, but also because it was light and relatively small. The guitar provided drive and vitality to people's musical expression and its presence was constant at every festive public event as well as at family celebrations, and on the stage, as part of the ever present short plays. On the other hand, and from a more academic point of view, some of the treatises and the printed and hand-written music that we still preserve show that the guitar played a significant role as a "cultivated" instrument. In this sense, some of the music produced by professional musicians is proof that there is a clear tendency to use the guitar for more ambitious musical pursuits.

The analysis of accounts provided by travellers and other influential individuals, and the study on the use of the guitar in the theatre both bring to life 18th century society and its relationship with the most archetypal of Spanish instruments, as some of Madrid's –and even Spain's– cultural history is finally researched in the manner it deserves.

This study appraises the role of the guitar in society and considers a wide range of musical aspects that relate to this instrument, underlying their relevance in the history of the Spanish guitar. Its aim is, as far as possible, to remedy the need for this stretch of the history of the guitar to be the object of a thorough musicological study.