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CALIFORNIA BACH SOCIETY  
Paul Flight, Artistic Director

presents

## **A Belén (To Bethlehem)**

Villancicos from the Old and New Worlds

with

**Richard Savino, baroque guitar**  
**Peter Maund, percussion**

**“All was so musically, sympathetically shaped and phrased [...] so appealing in sound and ensemble that I would have happily sat through a repeat of the entire thing.”** Robert Commanday, San Francisco Classical Voice, May 2011

Friday, December 2, 2011, 8pm at St. Mark's Lutheran Church,  
1111 O'Farrell Street at Franklin, San Francisco

Saturday, December 3, 2011, 8pm at All Saints' Episcopal Church,  
555 Waverley Street at Hamilton, Palo Alto

Sunday, December 4, 2011, 4pm at Saint Mark's Episcopal Church,  
2300 Bancroft Way at Ellsworth, Berkeley

Doors open 30 minutes prior to each performance

Tickets at the door: \$30 (discounts for advance purchase, seniors, and students)

(415) 262-0272 / <http://www.calbach.org> / [info@calbach.org](mailto:info@calbach.org)

**Palo Alto, November 4, 2011 — This December, California Bach Society showcases the Spanish Baroque Christmas tradition** - with music from the Iberian Peninsula as well as the Americas, where the Catholic liturgy was blended with indigenous dance forms, language, and melodies. An ensemble of Baroque guitar, strings, harp, and percussion joins

the 30-voice chorus for this lively program.

In addition to wonderful villancicos and double-choir motets from the Old and New Worlds, California Bach Society's program features rarely performed pieces by Padre Antonio Soler. Artistic Director Paul Flight learned of this composer about ten years ago and was eager to explore his delightful music, which is full of humorous references to the work of a music director.

## Biographies

Artistic Director **Dr. Paul Flight**, a noted choral conductor, teacher and singer, is in his sixth season with the California Bach Society. A former member of such distinguished ensembles as The Waverly Consort, Theatre of Voices, Pomerium Musices, and the New York Collegium, he brings a wealth of expertise to CBS. In addition, he is the Artistic Director of Schola Cantorum San Francisco, and the Founding Director of Chora Nova. For nine years, Dr. Flight was Principal Conductor of the Madison Early Music Festival, where he directed masterworks by Bach, Handel, Telemann, Vivaldi, Purcell, Dufay and Guerrero. He has twice been a Visiting Professor of Music at UC Berkeley, directing the Music Department's top choral ensembles. He conducted an operatic double-bill production of Gustav Holst's *Savitri* and Darius Milhaud's *Les malheurs d'Orphée* for Mills College. Dr. Flight received his doctorate from Indiana University, where he studied conducting with Robert Porco. His research focused on Venetian composer Giovanni Croce (1557-1609). He has recorded a program featuring the music of Croce for *Harmonia*, a nationally syndicated radio show. He recently appeared as a guest on KALW radio's performing arts program, *My Favorite Things*. Regarding his work with California Bach Society, a recent reviewer from San Francisco Classical Voice wrote, "Flight has made of the choral group a professional ensemble capable of every expressive nuance and glorious ensemble sound."

Guitarist/lutenist **Richard Savino** has been a featured performer throughout the US and abroad. He has been *Visiting Artistic Director* of the *Aston Magna Academy and Music Festival* (1993, 1995, 2005, 2009, 2010), the *Connecticut Early Music Festival* (2002), *Ensemble Rebel* (2010) and from 1994 - 1997 was *Coordinator of Performance Practice* at the Monadnock Music Festival in New Hampshire. He is the recipient of a *Diapason d'Or* (the French Grammy) and in 2010 his collaborative project with Ars Lyrica of Houston received a Grammy nomination. Mr. Savino received his Doctor of Musical Arts degree from SUNY at Stony Brook where he studied under Jerry Willard. He is presently a Collegiate Professor at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and Professor of Music at the California State University at Sacramento.

A native of San Francisco, **Peter Maund** studied percussion at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and music, folklore and ethnomusicology at the University of California, Berkeley. He has performed with numerous early and contemporary music ensembles throughout North America, the United Kingdom, Europe, Mexico and Israel. He was a founding member of Ensemble Alcatraz and Alasdair Fraser's Skyedance and has performed and recorded with Chanticleer, Davka, The Harp Consort, Hesperion XX, Kitka and Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, among others. Described by The Glasgow Herald as "the most considerate and imaginative of percussionists," he appears on over sixty recordings. He has served on the faculty of the University of California, Berkeley.

## Program Notes

During the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries Spain and Portugal were more powerful than at any time in their history. The conquest of Central and South America had brought rich rewards. Exploitation of the natural resources from the Americas, along with profit from the goods and commodities produced by subjugated indigenous labor, made these imperial countries immensely wealthy; this wealth helped to support much of the official musical activity of both church and state. Music flourished in the monasteries, cathedrals, and court chapels of the Iberian Peninsula during this prosperous era. At home, an intimate relationship existed between the religious institutions of Spain and the Papal establishment, with the result that many of the most talented musicians settled in Italy to study with Italian masters and to further their careers. Their music reflects the styles and techniques learned while living abroad, with their countrymen learning from them in turn. The most widely recognized masters of Iberian sacred music in the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries were Francisco Guerrero, Tomás Luis de Victoria, and Cristóbal de Morales.

An important musical and social development in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Spain and Portugal was the introduction of the *villancico* into religious services during the Christmas period and on certain major feast days. Originally a secular song form, the villancico had existed for more than a hundred years, but in an attempt to connect more fully and meaningfully with the faithful, new villancicos were composed with religious texts appropriate to the season. Francisco Guerrero (1528–1599) was among the many great composers to embrace the villancico. The thirty-one villancicos of his *Canciones y villanescas espirituales*, published in 1589, are considered by many to be little masterworks. The late 16<sup>th</sup>-century villancico has much in common with the French chanson in its free use of imitative polyphony alternating with homophonic passages of great rhythmic vitality. In their complexity and craftsmanship, the villancicos of Pedro Rimonte (1565–1627) are very much on a par with those of Guerrero, and they display the same stylistic features.

Sacred music flourished in Portugal, though on a smaller scale than in Spain. The most famous Portuguese composer of the time was Duarte Lobo (1565–1646), who served as choirmaster of Lisbon Cathedral. He composed a fine set of Christmas responsories in the polychoral style that quickly became prevalent in Iberia after its transplantation from Italy in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. His setting for double choir of *O magnum mysterium* is a fine example. A much less well-known composer of this period is the Spaniard Cristóbal Galán (c1630–1684), who worked at the convent of the Descalzas Reales in Madrid (the same institution for which Victoria worked at the end of his life). His extraordinary motet for double choir *Ave sanctissima Maria* lies in the stratosphere, so high are the ranges of the upper parts.

In the spectacular mountaintop monastery of Montserrat, outside Barcelona, the choirmaster Joan Cererols (1618–1676) composed music for the monastery choir. He is known today chiefly for a single villancico, the beautiful marizápalos *Serafín que con dulce armonía*. The *marizápalos* was a song with a special harmonic pattern that often served as a framework for improvisation, like the Italian *folia* or *romanesca*, and a specific melody became associated with it, which Cererols certainly adopted.

The desire of the church to make tangible emotional connections with the faithful was especially strong in the Americas, where conversion of the populace to Catholicism was ongoing. Many native people blended the central elements of Catholic belief with their indigenous customs, and the villancicos composed in the New World reflected this trend. Perhaps the most enthusiastic composers of these works were the choirmasters and organists working in the cathedrals of New Spain. Men such as Gaspar Fernandes in Mexico and Juan de Araujo in Bolivia produced some of the most lively and interesting

villancicos, some featuring a blend of local dialects, among them the indigenous Quechua language of the Incan civilization. The oldest example of printed polyphony in the Americas is the processional hymn to the Virgin Mary *Hanacpachap cusscuinnin*, from 1631, which is found in an instruction manual for Spanish priests and is written in Quechua. It is a very poignant piece, its text and mood capturing something of the great suffering and devastation inflicted upon the indigenous people of the Americas, who perished in vast numbers at the hands of their colonial masters.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century the villancico underwent the same stylistic changes as other genres of the pre-classic period. Accompaniments of two violins and basso continuo were common, and in the hands of exponents like Padre Antonio Soler some villancicos even began to resemble scenes in an opera buffa, but always with an overlying sacred theme. Soler (1729-1783) was a priest and composer at Royal Court of El Escorial, where he produced a voluminous output of villancicos and, like Domenico Scarlatti, keyboard sonatas. He clearly had a terrific sense of humor.

Paul Flight

### **Synopsis of *De un maestro de cappilla* by Padre Antonio Soler**

This Christmas *villancico* tells an amusing story. The Maestro, depicted as a fearsome teacher who threatens the children of the choir with a whipping if they don't learn their solfège, enters the scene after the choir sings that, as usual, the *villancico* they are to sing for their Christmas festival has not been prepared. Though they fear him, they provoke the Maestro more and more with naughty exclamations and pranks. The Maestro has the children sing some charming five-part canons in solfège. A storm arrives and the village bells ring. Everyone pleads that the storm be averted, and the story ends seriously with a prayer.

### **Synopsis of *Congregante e festero* by Padre Antonio Soler**

This *villancico* opens with the chorus announcing that the Christ Child has just been born in Bethlehem and that three masses must be sung to Him. The chorus relates that a Churchgoer has come to discuss with the Music Director the price of composing a new mass. The Music Director asks for one thousand sovereigns. The Churchgoer agrees to this price and is assured by the Music Director that he will hear something quite marvelous. The Music Director describes what he has in mind. The chorus sings the phrases of the new mass as he writes them. In the fourth and final verse, the Churchgoer asks for a fugue before he leaves. The Music Director asks for his money, and the fugue concludes the *villancico*.

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