

*Digging, Gluing, Printing, Playing:
Making the Music of Colonial Mexico Come to Life*

Craig H. Russell

Rummaging around through the “Classical” section of compact disc bins, either in record stores or online, one finds an increasing number of intriguing recordings of the choral music from Colonial Mexico. Not only have recordings of this enchanting and captivating repertoire become best sellers in the past decade, but increasingly, the premiere choral groups of the Americas and Europe have been programming and performing in live concert—sometimes magnificently—the music of Colonial Mexico.¹ In short, interest in the vocal repertoire of Mexico from its Viceregal Period (lasting from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries) has blossomed. And of course, that presents the modern choral conductor who wants to delve into this material with a series of challenges. It is those obstacles—the dilemmas that a choral conductor confronts when conceiving of and planning for an upcoming concert of Colonial Mexican music—that is the core of today’s presentation.²

In order to build a cogent, entertaining, and successful concert program, a choral conductor will encounter the following tasks:

1. **Digging:** in order to produce a concert, one first has to find the pool of available and appropriate genres from which to select the specific compositions. This is more problematic than it first appears, for terminology can be misleading. One finds hardly any works labeled “oratorio” or “opera”—but one will come across stacks of impressive, large-scale choral works in Mexican archives, nevertheless, if one understands the genre classifications. So, how does one find or “dig up” choral works from Viceregal Mexico? What is the scope of the repertoire? What are the dominant genres and their characteristics?
2. **Gluing:** since pieces do not exist in isolation, the choral conductor well might consider how the various genres were “glued together” at the time. Rather than line up unrelated musical ditties at a concert in a string of musical non-sequiturs, one might ask how the various genres were related and interwoven. What were the performance expectations for Mexican genres in the past, and how might those expectations be utilized successfully in a modern concert setting?
3. **Printing:** in order to arrange an actual concert, a conductor is immediately faced with the dilemma of finding “printed scores” to place in the hands of the choir members. Citations in archival catalogues and scholarly footnotes are generally insufficient. As a result, a conductor is faced with the question, “where might one look for modern, published performing editions with some reasonable expectation of success?”
4. **Playing:** lastly, once the conductor has the scores in hand, he or she has to decide several nitty-gritty details with regard to the size of the performing ensemble and appropriate choices for

instrumentation (especially with regard to the continuo grouping).

In addressing any of these four tasks, one first has to wade through a bog of confusing terminology that can befuddle modern musicians or even conceal essential elements of musical style and content. If we were to peruse through the titles of Mexican choral works from the past, a plethora of odd terms arise (*villancico*, *coloquio*, etc.) that have no real English equivalent. In addition, even genres that appear to be cognates have subtle differences between the English words and their Spanish siblings. A Mexican *motete* by Tollis de la Rocca, for example, is not really the same as a “motet” by William Byrd. A Bach “cantata” is not cut from the same cloth as a Mexican *cantada* by Sumaya. In short, the main process for “digging up” works and then “gluing” them together begins with a clear understanding of the kinds of pieces that exist and the terminology or titles that describe them. The following links (figs. 1-10) define the essential elements of the following categories, respectively: [maitines](#), [responsorio](#), [motete](#), [villancico](#), [solo](#), [cantada](#), [misa](#), [loa](#), [coloquio](#), and [versos](#).

[Figure 11](#) provides a graph or map of the essential elements that combine to make a single Matins service—arguably the most important genre of the musical arts in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Mexico. The scale of a Matins service was colossal; typically, a single “performance” would last approximately three hours, much like an oratorio or opera from the same era. Although it is not a requirement to replicate this immense structure in order to enjoy isolated excerpts, a choral conductor nevertheless has the opportunity to “glue together” or reconstruct a larger gesture for a modern performance—such as an entire “act” or “Nocturne” from a Matins service. In so doing, the audience gets a feel for some of the more grandiose structures that pervaded the Mexican cultural landscape. We all know that one gets a different view of Mozart by watching an entire act from an opera than from listening to a hodgepodge of popular aria tunes. The same can be said of the Matins services of Juan Gutiérrez de Padilla, Manuel de Sumaya, or Ignacio de Jerusalem. It is rather a shame that most modern concerts of Mexican music simply plaster together little tidbits of pieces extracted from widely disparate contexts. That conveys a mistaken impression that Mexican culture consisted only of hors d’oeuvres and had no extravagant or immense musical creations of architectural stature that could compare in splendor with Neapolitan operas or English oratorios.

Modern conductors encounter other frustrating obstacles, such as locating repertoire that features a flamboyant vocal soloist, with or without a choral backdrop. Where should one look to find a piece that fits the bill? One of the best sources for literature that spotlights a solo vocal virtuoso is the stack of Responsories from Matins services (especially those Responsories that are numbered as “No. 2,” “No. 5,” or “No. 8” for they often feature a single singer). Responsories Nos. 3, 4, and 6, and 7 frequently have soloistic fireworks for one vocalist, interspersed with lush choral interjections. Remarkably, many of these Responsories adhere to both Medieval and Baroque (or Classical) models for their inspiration. Take, for example, the thrilling Responsory “Signum Magnum” set by Ignacio de Jerusalem in his *Matins for Our Lady of Guadalupe*. [3](#) On the one hand, the text setting rigorously traces out the order of words as prescribed in Medieval Responsories. It begins with a

Respond (subdivided into two parts, *Ra* and *Rb*), followed by a versicle from a Psalm (denoted by a letter “V” at the beginning of that text), and a subsequent return to last half of the Respond (*Rb*). (See [Fig. 12](#) for maps of the plainchant and orchestrated versions of Responsory “Signum magnum.”) At the same time, however, Jerusalem gives us the pairing of “recitative and aria” that we would encounter in almost any European vocal genre of the same time period. The recitative matches up with the first part of the Respond (*Ra*); the da capo aria’s opening section takes flight at the Respond’s midpoint (*Rb*); the Psalm verse spells out the central contrasting section of the da capo aria; and with the return of section *Rb* of the Respond, we hear a return to the opening section of the da capo aria. The net effect is fabulous, for it juxtaposes the ancient against the modern in a fluid and unforced way. For the choral conductor searching for accessible yet thrilling vocal literature that could compare favorably with the recitative-aria pairings of European composers, one could hardly do better than programming various Responsories from Ignacio de Jerusalem’s Matins services or those of his Mexican colleagues.

With respect to the third problem discussed here, a “Select Bibliography of Performing Editions” as well as a select “Discography” appear in the [references](#) accompanying this article. These two resources can help provide a head start to anyone hoping to explore this literature through sound recordings or to those seeking published editions that are “ready to go.”

The last issue on today’s list, “Playing,” could be a dissertation unto itself. Nevertheless, a few words of advice might prove helpful.⁴ During the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a typical Mexican chapel had twelve voices, subdivided often into two choirs (SSAT and SATB). Choir I normally featured one singer on a part, whereas Choir II placed two vocalists on each line—thus equaling twelve singers. Granted, the enormous metropolitan centers had more vocalists on their rosters than twelve, but they also had multiple services each day, so they had to spread the workload among a large number of trained musicians. We can judge by the number of performance parts for the compositions that on normal occasions, twelve vocalists was the “industry standard.”

The string ensemble normally had three first violins, three second violins, a cello (or *violón*), and a bass. The two lower instruments did not have separate lines but instead were part of the *acompañamiento* or basso continuo. Evidence also points to the occasional use of a viola, but only once in a while did a violist have a “separate,” autonomous line. Instead, it served as an additional sonority within the continuo grouping; it could be added or withdrawn in the same way that a harpsichordist or organist can add or withdraw “stops.”

By the early 1700s, a pair of valveless horns became nearly obligatory in any given ensemble. Documentary evidence demonstrates that the horn players were also capable of playing clarion trumpets, but for particularly festive pieces both horns and trumpets could be written into the score. For centuries, churches would not always hire trumpeters as members of the permanent musicians’ roster, but instead would “borrow” them or hire them away for occasional gigs from the military drum-and-bugle corps. This pairing of drums with trumpets that was commonplace in military

environments, spilled over into cathedral practice as well. If trumpets played, then timpanists usually showed up too as part of the standardized military combo. No performance parts were scribbled out onto paper for the timpanists until the early 1800s, even though timpanists appear on the payment records for cathedral jobs centuries earlier. We can assume that the timpanists merely looked over the shoulder of the trumpet players and improvised an appropriate line, tuning their drums to the tonic and dominant of the relevant piece.

With regard to woodwinds, oboists were employed in pairs and appear in almost every Vespers, Matins, or Mass setting written from the early 1740s onward. Like the horn players—they too were able to double on other instruments, most often putting down their oboes to take up their flutes or octavinos (that played a full octave above the flute's register). For particularly festive occasions, the cathedral resources could be expanded to include both oboes and flutes simultaneously. A bassoon player was an essential part of any cathedral or church establishment of any size or importance. The bassoonist only rarely had an independent line but instead was a core member of the basso continuo grouping, sharing the low melodic line with the cello, bass, or violón.

The small figures in the continuo line spelled out harmonies that were to be filled in by improvising chordal instruments, the most important of which was the organ. As a rule, the harpsichord was not employed in the cathedral except during Lent. The organ supported the rich, full-bodied sound of Choir II, but it normally dropped out when the smaller Choir I was featured. Choir I was half the size of Choir II, and the chordal instrument for this smaller grouping, therefore, was the more delicate-sounding cross-strung harp (the *arpa de dos órdenes*). Each choir was distinctive, then, not only for its register and the size of choral sonority, but also by a defining chordal timbre in the accompaniment.

Just as the timpani and trumpet were paired together in military establishments, so the baroque guitar regularly joined the harp in theatrical productions and dance combos in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Therefore, it is plausible that the baroque guitar served as a companion to the nearly obligatory harp in the cathedral as well. A harp-guitar pairing could help explain why guitars are so often found in church music instrument inventories. They could have provided the sparkle and rhythmic vigor of strummed chords that so profoundly pervaded Mexican life throughout the Viceregal Period.

The cathedrals and churches of Mexico have provided Western culture with some of its richest gems. As has just been seen, an understanding of Mexican genres helps to clarify what Viceregal Mexico has to offer us and moves us well on our way through the tasks of “digging” and “gluing.” Choir directors hoping to provide a new luster to their more traditional programming, can do so now by including some of these musical gems from the New World with increasing ease. Due to the “printing” of adventuresome publishers such as CENIDIM and the Inter-American Music Review, scores are becoming readily available. Furthermore, research has provided many answers to

the mysterious questions concerning “playing” this literature. Taken together, then, we have what we need to prepare such a concert: we have the necessary tools to resolve the tasks of digging, gluing, printing, and playing. Now, we have but one task left— enjoying!

Notes

1. For a brief discography of several admirable recordings of this literature, consult the discography in the [references](#) section of this article.
2. If one wishes to pursue the research dealing with Mexican Viceregal music in a more rigorous and detailed way, consult the scholarly musicological articles by Robert M. Stevenson, Aurelio Tello, Alice Ray Catalyne, Steven Barwick, John Koegel, William John Summers, Ricardo Miranda, Drew Davies, Antonio Robles-Cahero, Grayson Wagstaff, and Craig H. Russell.
3. For an excellent recording of Ignacio de Jerusalem’s *Signum magnum apparuit in caelo*, consult Chanticleer’s compact disk, Ignacio de Jerusalem’s “Matins for the Virgin of Guadalupe,” Chanticleer & Chanticleer Sinfonia, dir. by Joe Jennings (Hamburg: Teldec, 1998), Teldec 3984-21829-2. Music score available from: Russell Eds. / 541 Lilac Drive / Los Osos, CA 93402-3749.
4. I address performance practice issues in some detail in my article “Eighteenth Century” in the *Encyclopedia of Mexico: History, Society & Culture* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1998). Also, considerable attention is devoted to this topic in my forthcoming book, *From Serra to Sancho: Music and Pageantry in the California Missions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming early 2008).

Figure 1. *Matines*

The Matins Service (performed on the evening preceding any major feast day or celebration) was probably the most prestigious compositional genre in eighteenth-century Mexico. It is comprised of three nocturns (roughly equivalent in scale to an act in an opera or oratorio). Each nocturn has three Responsories—extended choral works that are often multi-sectional having several “numbers.” The third nocturn usually begins with two Responsories but replaces what would have been the third and final Responsory with a setting of the “Te Deum.” (The structure can be seen in [fig. 11](#)) Thus a complete Matins service requires 8 Responsories (or 8 substitute villancicos) plus the Te Deum. There are dozens of important Matines services from the Mexican choral heritage, each of which lasts between one to two hours and is thus roughly equivalent in splendor and scale to a European oratorio or opera from the epoch.

Fig. 1A. Cover page from Ignacio de Jerusalem's *Eight Responsories for the Matins of Our Lady of Guadalupe*.

Courtesy of the Archivo Musical: Cathedral Metropolitano de Mexico. Photo by Craig Russell.

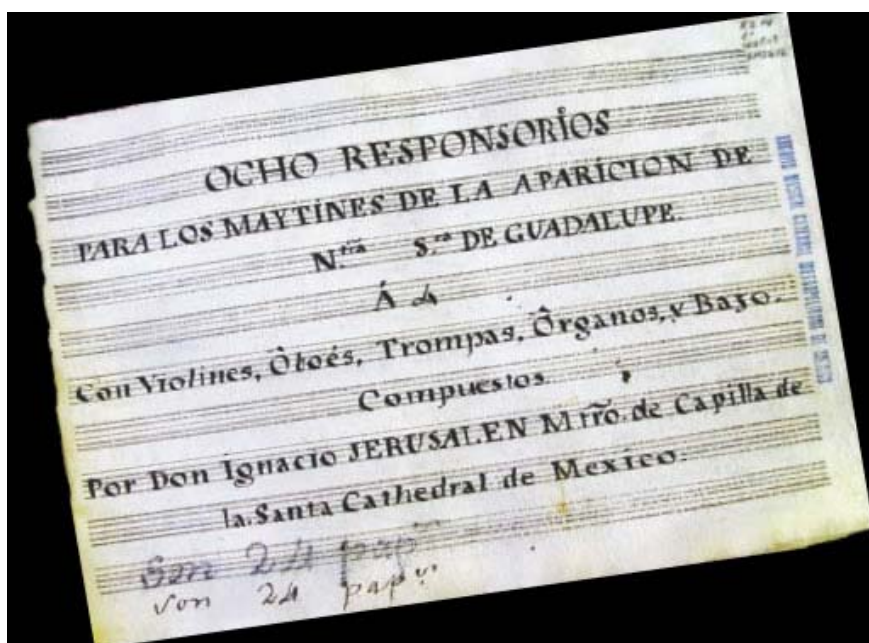


Fig. 1B. Score sample from the Te Deum movement. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library



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Figure 2. *Responsorio*

Responsories in a Matines service were usually choral, although some composers such as Mateo Tollis de la Rocca and Ignacio de Jerusalem occasionally dedicate a Responsory or two to a vocal soloist instead: the sonorities are thus varied through the course of the evening, sometimes presenting rousing polychoral settings, and at others featuring lyrical solo numbers. Their formal structure is often complex, faithfully replicating the structure traced out in the original Medieval chant, such as the forms: *Rab-V-Rb* or *Rab-V-Rb-Dx-Rb* where the letter R represents the Respond and its two subdivisions, V represents the Psalm verse, and D represents the Doxology). Responsories are accompanied by chamber orchestra (violins, woodwinds, etc.) whereas *villancicos* are vocal with a *basso continuo* accompaniment, probably played by baroque harp and baroque guitar. (Consult [fig. 12](#) concerning the structure of the Marian Responsory “Signum magnum” and Jerusalem’s setting of it.)

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Figure 3. *Motete*

In eighteenth-century Mexico, a “motete” generally applies to a substantial Responsory that was not composed as an integral part of a complete series, but was intended to be substituted for a Responsory in a Matins service. The most common place for substitution to occur is the first or eighth Responsory, understandably, since the beginning or ending of a cycle would be the most propitious location for added splendor that an awe-inspiring motete would bring.

Fig. 3. First motete for the second Nocturn of Ignacio de Jerusalem's *Matins for the Virgin of Guadalupe*. Courtesy of the Archivo Musical Catedral Metropolitana de Mexico. Photo by Craig Russell.





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Figure 4. *Villancico*

The villancico was a sacred piece in the vernacular as opposed to Latin and was nearly always in a secular and popular vein (unlike the more formal style of Responsories). On a major feast day such as Christmas, Corpus Christi, the Assumption, the Ascension, the Apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe, St. Joseph's Day, St. Peter's Day, or San Ildefonso's Day, the eight Latin Responsories of a Matins service can be replaced with eight villancicos in the vernacular (such as Castilian, Gallician, Catalan, Portuguese, Nahuatl, or even Gypsy or pseudo-African dialects) and in radically varied styles. The collected set of eight provides a sort of panorama of folk styles and street-life in the Mexican landscape. They usually require choir or ensemble resources with a simple basso continuo line that is probably realized by instruments from the street such as harp, baroque guitar, and hand percussion. Structurally, too, the villancicos adhere to the folkloric: a chorus (or *estribillo*) alternates back and forth with short verses or *coplas*.

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Figure 5. Solo

The solo is a piece for vocal soloist and chamber ensemble or orchestra that resembles the villancico's expected structure estribillo-coplas-estribillo.

Fig. 5A. Chamber passage from the solo for the second responsorio of Ignacio Jerusalem's *Matins for the Virgin of Guadalupe*. Courtesy of the Archivo Musical Catedral Metropolitana de Mexico. Photo by Craig Russell.



Fig. 5B. Solo part for the second responsorio of Ignacio Jerusalem's *Matins for the Virgin of Guadalupe*. Courtesy of the Archivo Musical Catedral Metropolitana de Mexico. Photo by Craig Russell.





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Figure 6. *Cantada*

The *cantada* also features a solo voice, but it shuns the Spanish *estribillo-coplas-estribillo* format and instead presents a recitative and da capo aria—or a string of them. Thus, a *solo* is folkloric much like a *villancico*, but a *cantada* is an elevated style steeped in Italian culture. Many of Sumaya's *solos*, however, have a Italianate, semi-operatic aria and recitative followed by a spunky *seguidillas* to conclude the work. The *seguidillas* is the antithesis of the Italianate. They were performed by *majos* who wore slouch hats and capes and prided themselves in their "Spanish" culture and resented the wholesale importation of influences from France and Italy. The *majo* ridiculed those high-falootin,' hoighty-toighty aristocrats (labeled with the pejorative terms *curotaco* or *petimetre*) who loved foreign refinements such as opera and the French *danse à deux*. Thus, the Mexican *cantada* contains a microcosm of this conflict between the *majo* and the *curotaco*, beginning with the Italian world but ending with the middle-class, down-home, spunky *seguidillas* that was considered *muy español!*

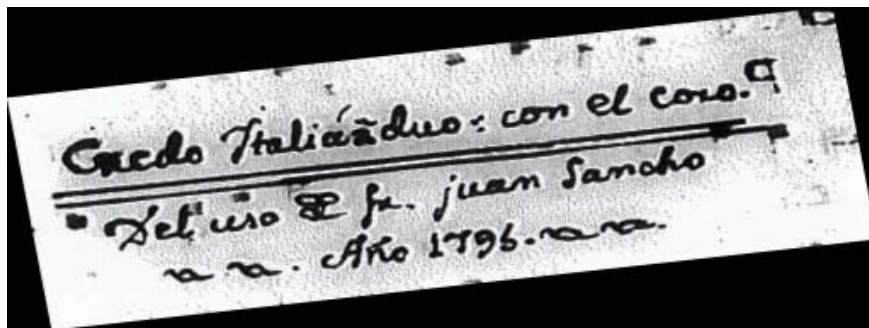
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Figure 7. *Misa*

Most Mass settings in the eighteenth century are concerted (that is, they combine voices and instruments). The larger texts of the “Gloria” and “Credo” are usually subdivided into separate, autonomous “movements” or numbers. Generally, the voices are disposed into two choirs of unequal size with Choir One comprised of four soloists (SSAT) and Choir Two consisting of eight singers doubling on four parts (arranged as SATB). The vocalists are accompanied by a small string orchestra, organ, continuo line, pairs of horns and often a pair of winds or clarion trumpets. Very often the “Agnus Dei” is missing; when it is absent, there is abundant evidence indicating that the “Agnus Dei” should be sung to the same music as the previous “Sanctus.”

Fig. 7 Credo, Italian (from title page). Courtesy of the Bancroft Library.





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Figure 8. *Loa*

The loa was a single-movement work in praise of a noble or high church official, almost always written for a special occasion to honor a specific person. As a rule, it is tacked on at the beginning of a larger work or as the opening of an evening's theatrical entertainment.



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Figure 9. *Coloquio*

The *coloquio* was a semi-dramatic work that incorporated music, poetry, dramatic readings, and sometimes even short plays. Although peripherally associated with religious institutions, they are not part of church service. They are often allegorical or pastoral with shepherds, shepherdesses, etc. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz—Mexico’s Shakespeare—is a major author of *coloquios*.



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Figure 10. *Versos*

Interspersed into the Matins and Vespers services were often short “versos” or Psalm verses. By the mid-eighteenth century these *versos* were usually played by the cathedral orchestra. The stacks of uncatalogued orchestral *versos* in the Mexico City and Puebla Cathedrals suggests that this was an important orchestral genre and their abundant presence debunks the assertion that Mexico had no orchestral literature worthy of mention. Mexico and Guatemala did have elegant instrumental works but they were called *versos*—not overtures or symphonies.

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Figure 11. *Order of Eighteenth-Century Matins in Mexico*

Preparation

- Processional (optional)
- Domine labia mea (intoned)
- **Invitatory** (concerted—interspersed with chanted Psalm 94)
- **Hymn** (concerted, often a “Pastoral” in 6/8 time)

Nocturne 1

- Antiphon 1 & Psalm (plainchant)*
- Antiphon 2 & Psalm (plainchant)*
- Antiphon 3 & Psalm (plainchant)*
- Versicle, Lord’s Prayer & Absolution (intoned)
- Benediction 1 & Lesson 1 (intoned)
- **Responsory 1** (concerted, with choir)
- Benediction 2 & Lesson 2 (intoned, continuation of previous Lesson)
- **Responsory 2** (often a solo or duet with orchestra) [Fig. 11A]
- Benediction 3 & Lesson 3 (intoned, continuation of previous Lesson)
- **Responsory 3** (concerted with choir, with virtuosity for soloist)



Fig. 11A (above). Responsorio Segundo de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, Solo con Violín, Oboes, y Trompas by Ignacio de Jerusalem. Courtesy of the Archivo Musical Catedral Metropolitana de Mexico. Photo by Craig Russell.



Nocturne 2

- Antiphon 4 & Psalm (plainchant) *
- Antiphon 5 & Psalm (plainchant) *
- Antiphon 6 & Psalm (plainchant) *
- Versicle, Lord's Prayer & Absolution (intoned)
- Benediction 4 & Lesson 4 (intoned)
- **Responsory 4** (concerted, with choir)
- Benediction 5 & Lesson 5 (intoned, continuation of previous Lesson) [Fig. 11B]
- **Responsory 5** (often a solo or duet with orchestra)
- Benediction 6 & Lesson 6 (intoned, continuation of previous Lesson)
- **Responsory 6** (concerted with choir, with virtuosity for soloist)

Fig. 11B (above). Motete Primero del 2o Nocturno de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe by Ignacio de Jerusalem. Courtesy of the Archivo Musical Catedral Metropolitana de Mexico. Photo by Craig Russell.



Nocturne 3

- Antiphon 7 & Psalm (plainchant) *
- Antiphon 8 & Psalm (plainchant) *
- Antiphon 9 & Psalm (plainchant) *
- Versicle, Lord's Prayer & Absolution (intoned)
- Benediction 7 & Lesson 7 (intoned)
- **Responsory 7** (concerted, with choir)
- Benediction 8 & Lesson 8 (intoned, continuation of previous Lesson)
- **Responsory 8** (often a solo or duet with orchestra)
- Benediction 9 & Lesson 9 (intoned, continuation of previous Lesson)
- **Te Deum** (a "numbers" arrangement with each section of text having its own music as a separate movement: choral sections, duets, solos, etc.) [Fig. 11C]

Fig. 11C (above). Te Deum by Ignacio de Jerusalem. Courtesy of the Archivo Musical Catedral Metropolitana de Mexico. Photo by Craig Russell.

* During any Psalm, short symphonies (called *versos*) may be inserted. The sonorities then shift back and forth between plainchant and instrumental interludes.

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Figure 12. Example of Responsorial Structure

Signum magnum apparuit in caelo - plainchant version

Chant taken from Liber Responsorialis pro Festis I. Classis et Communi Sanctorum. Juxta Ritum Monasticum. Adnectuntur Invitatorium et Hymnus Aliorum Festerum (Solesmes: E Typocrapheo Sancti Petri, 1895).

Responsorium 7.

Ra

S 7. *Signum magnum apparuit in caelo*

lo: mu-li-er ani-cta so-le, & lu-

Rb *na sub pé-di-bus e-jus: * Et in cá-pi-te e-*

jus co-ró-

na stel-lá-rum du-ó-de-cim. (y) In-

du-it e-am Dómi-nus vestiméntis sa-lú-tis, indumento

justi-ti-æ, & qua-si sponsam orná-vit e-am mo-

Orchestral Version
Responsory No. 4 from *Matins for Our Lady of Guadalupe* (1764)
Ignacio de Jerusalem

	Respond	Recitative	
		instrumental introduction	*track 8 0:00-0:31
Ra	<i>Soprano Soloist</i>		0:32-0:53
	Signum magnum apparuit in caelo, Mulier amicta sole, et Luna sub pedibus ejus.	A great sign appeared in the heavens: a woman enrobed in the Sun, and the Moon under her feet.	
		Aria (A)	
		instrumental ritornello	0:54-1:12
Rb	<i>Soprano Soloist</i>		1:13-1:35
	Et in capite ejus corona duodecim stellarum, corona duodecim stellarum.	And on her head a twelve-starred crown, etc.	
		Choir	1:36-1:56
	Et in capite ejus corona duodecim stellarum, corona duodecim stellarum.		
	Et in capite ejus corona duodecim stellarum, corona duodecim stellarum, corona duodecim stellarum, duodecim stellarum.		1:57-2:29
	Et in capite ejus corona duodecim stellarum, corona duodecim stellarum.		2:30-2:49
		<i>instrumental closing gesture</i>	2:50-2:57
	Verse (B)		
V	<i>Alto Soloist</i>		
	Fundamenta ejus in montibus Sanctis.	Her foundation is on the holy mountains.	2:58-3:04
		Diligit Dominus portas Sion super omnia, tabernacula Jacob, tabernacula Jacob.	3:05-3:23
		He praises the gates of Zion above all the tents of Jacob, the tents of Jacob.	
	Repeat (A')		3:24-5:32

*Timings apply to Chanticleer's recording of *Signum Magnum* on the CD Ignacio de Jerusalem's *Matins for the Virgin of Guadalupe* (Teldec, 1998).