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Contact: Jo Ann Lloyd
Cal Poly Public Affairs
(805) 756-151; jilloyd@calpoly.edu

Cal Poly Music Professor Craig Russell Earns High Marks at Disney Concert Hall

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- Cal Poly Music Professor Craig Russell earned high marks recently from Los Angeles music critics for a concert he helped create at the Walt Disney Concert Hall.

Last week the Los Angeles Master Chorale performed early Latin American music discovered and reconstructed by Russell, a renowned expert on early California music. Russell also performed on the Baroque guitar with the accompanying orchestra, Musica Angelica, which, he calls “the best period-instrument orchestra in Southern California.”

Grant Gershon, artistic director of the Los Angeles Master Chorale, asked Russell for his help in putting together the music for the concert. Much of the music was the direct result of Russell’s investigative work in Colonial archives and in his reconstruction of these works.

“We performed several works by Ignacio de Jerusalem that I photographed in the Mexico City Cathedral and then reconstructed,” Russell said. “Most of the material for the concert is excerpted from my score of Jerusalem’s ‘Maitines para Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe’ (‘Matins for Our Lady of Guadalupe’), written in 1764. To recreate the music, I had to patch snippets of information together from many different locations in the cathedral, since they were not consolidated in one single location.

“This work is somewhat like Joseph Haydn’s “Creation” in style except that occasionally we get a little bit of Mexican flare -- some musical picante sauce. Jerusalem was one of the most popular composers in California mission literature. This is music from our own backyard, so to speak,” Russell said.

Los Angeles Times critic Richard S. Ginell said, "It's been a long time coming, but at last, a large body of music composed in the Spanish New World from the 16th to the 19th centuries is reemerging ... The most substantial work sampled was de Jerusalem’s ‘Matins for the Virgin of Guadalupe’ ... It's doubtful that the original listeners in the missions ever heard these pieces sung as richly and lusciously as they were in this 21st century concert hall.”

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