



## RECORDING OF THE MONTH

### *Pedro Ruimonte en Bruselas*

Herman Stinders (organ)

La Grande Chapelle / Albert Recasens

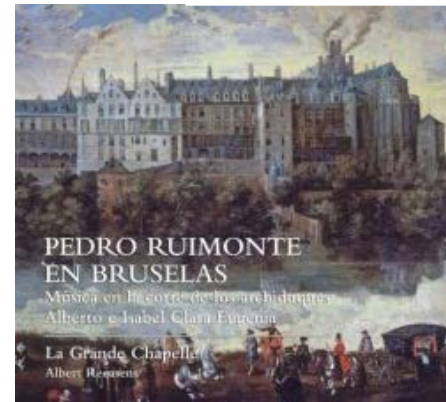
rec. 2017, Onze-Lieve-Vrouwkapel Elzenveld, Antwerp, Belgium

Texts and translations included

**LAUDA LAU017** [63:00 + 51:20]

There was a time when the southern Netherlands, today largely the region known as Belgium, was the breeding ground for singers and composers who dominated the music scene in Europe. They were in the service of the main churches and royal or aristocratic chapels across the continent. The Franco-Flemish school, of which they were the representatives, was the leading force until the emergence of the modern style around 1600. In the region itself there were many interesting and prestigious positions to be held, for instance at the court of the regents, who ruled the Netherlands in the name of the Habsburg sovereign.

In the last decades of the 16th century, however, music life in Flanders was in decline. That was the result of the revolt of the northern part of the Low Countries against the rule of the Habsburg-Spanish dynasty, from 1555 in the person of Philip II of Spain. It caused a political and economic crisis, which demanded the complete attention of the regent. In 1595 Philip II appointed Archduke Albert VII of Austria regent of the Netherlands. In 1598 Albert married Philip's daughter Isabella Clara Eugenia, and they ruled the Netherlands together. They attempted to turn the tide and restore their court in Brussels to its former glory. It took some time before these attempts bore fruit. The Twelve Years' Truce between the conflicting parties (1609-1621) played a major role in the revival of the court as a centre of the arts.



The present production sheds light on music life in the early decades of the 17th century. The key figure is Pedro Ruimonte (or Rimonte). He was from Zaragoza in Spain and probably travelled to Brussels in the company of the newly-wed couple. By 1601 he was master of their chapel and chamber music, a position he held until at least 1611. He is put into his historical perspective through the inclusion of music of some of his colleagues, who either worked at the same court or were active elsewhere in the southern Netherlands. Like Ruimonte, the main composers of the time were from outside the region. John Bull (not included here) and Peter Philips had left England for various reasons; in the case of the latter it was his Catholic faith. His countryman Richard Dering, who also stayed some time in Brussels, came from Italy, where he had converted to Catholicism.

One of the effects of the presence of musicians from elsewhere was the mixture of various influences. Like Dering, Philips had been in Italy, where he observed the latest musical fashions. In his sacred works he adopted the Roman polychoral style (*Benedictus Dominus; Caecilia virgo*). He also composed sacred concertos for solo voices and basso continuo in the monodic style (*Cantate Domino; Sicut misit me vivens Pater*). Ruimonte also composed polychoral works (*Sancta Maria, succurre miseris*), but is mainly represented here by two other genres: the madrigal and the *villancico*.

Ruimonte's madrigals – on Spanish texts – are in the Italian style, but not so much the style which had developed in the late decades of the 16th century, with a strong connection between text and music. They were rather modelled after the older madrigal of the mid-16th century. His madrigals are certainly not devoid of text expression, but madrigalisms – marked depictions of the text – are rare. They are dominated by imitative polyphony.

The *villancico* was a characteristically Spanish genre, with origins in the early renaissance; the first known specimens date from the late 15th century. During the 16th century composers started to write *villancicos* in polyphonic style. Whereas they were originally secular in character, towards the end of the 16th century an increasing number of devotional *villancicos* were written, especially for Christmastide. This development reflects the growing influence of the Counter-Reformation. That development can also be observed in Ruimonte's oeuvre. *Quiero dormir y non puedo* for six voices is an example of a secular *villancico*: "I would sleep and cannot, for love robs me of sleep". It is followed by *Mal puede estar escondida*, a piece for Christmastide, which – as is quite often the case – also refers to Jesus's Passion: "And you, chosen Virgin, cause of such good fortune, have forbearance with his death for he comes to give us life". *Virgen escogida*, about the Virgin Mary, bears witness to the importance of the veneration of Mary in the Counter-Reformation. Pieces like these remind us that the regent couple not only wanted to restore the state of the arts, but also aimed to strengthen the position of the Catholic faith. It is interesting that Henri Vanhulst, in his liner notes, sees a connection between the *villancico* and the popular songs for Christmastide written in the southern Netherlands: "The *villancico* form inspired a number of composers of the old Spanish Netherlands in their Flemish Christmas songs, generally known as *cantiones natalitiae*."

The inclusion of a piece by Girolamo Frescobaldi seems a bit odd, but he was in Brussels for some time in 1607 in the retinue of the cardinal and nuncio Guido Bentivoglio. In 1608 he published here his first book of madrigals, dedicated to the cardinal. He is not represented here with a keyboard piece – the genre for which he is best known – but a *canzon* which also pays tribute to the polychoral tradition of his home country. Organ works are included, but they are from the pen of Pieter Cornet, one of the few home-bred musicians who played a major role in music life at the time. For a number of years, Cornet was organist at Albert's court.

Another composer from the region was Matheo Romero, born as Mathieu Rosmarin in Liège. He is included here is not because he worked at the regent's court: around 1585 Rosmarin left Liège for Madrid, where he joined the Capilla flamenca. The reason is rather that Isabella may have heard him when she was living with her father in Madrid. In Spain Rosmarin was known as Matheo Romero. He soon received the nickname Maestro Capitán which is used in several manuscripts. When King Philip III ascended the throne, he appointed Romero as the new maestro de capilla.

Pedro Ruimonte is one of the lesser-known composers of the late renaissance. It is not the first time that his music is recorded. In 2005 Enchiriadis released a disc with *villancicos* and madrigals, and that same year Et'cetera produced a recording of his *Lamentations of Jeremiah*, performed by the ensemble La Hispanoflamenca. The addition of another disc is most welcome, considering the quality and the variety of his oeuvre. The present production is especially interesting in that he is put into his context, through vocal and instrumental pieces of some of his colleagues and also through the liner notes, which include much interesting musical and historical information about his time and his place in the picture.

I have heard quite a number of recordings by La Grande Chapelle, and without exception they were of the highest quality. That is the case here as well. Nine singers are involved in the performances, but every piece is executed with one voice per part. That seems the historically most appropriate line-up, and that goes in particular for the madrigals. It is of the greatest importance that in such pieces the voices blend perfectly, and that is the case here. The approach to the *villancicos* is particularly interesting: this kind of repertoire is often performed in an exuberant manner, mostly with instruments, lutes and/or guitars and sometimes also percussion. The latter is completely omitted here, and the role of the (arch)lutes is rather modest. The character of Ruimonte's *villancicos* may point in the direction of a more intimate interpretation, but it is also the approach of Albert Recasens. I have heard him in *villancicos* by later composers, which were mostly performed in a comparable manner. I find this refreshing, as it puts the genre in a somewhat different light. A number of pieces are performed with voices and instruments, and here the balance is pretty much ideal. The instrumentalists do a fine job. As in other projects, Recasens has surrounded himself with singers who know what it takes to bring this music to life. In the solo pieces some of the singers have the opportunity to show their qualities.

In short, this is an outstanding production from every possible angle. Reason enough to label it Recording of the Month.

**Johan van Veen**

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CD 1

**Peter PHILIPS (1560/61-1628)**

Benedictus Dominus a 8, motet [3:25]

Jubilate Deo a 8, motet [2:52]

**Pedro RUIMONTE (1565-1627)**

Quiero dormir y no puedo a 6, villancico [5:44]

Mal puede estar escondida a 6, villancico [5:41]

**Pieter CORNET (1570/80-1633)**

Fantasia 8. toni [4:24]

**Pedro RUIMONTE**

¿Has visto al despuntar...? a 4, madrigal [5:49]

Caduco tiempo a 4, madrigal [5:03]

De la piel de sus ovejas a 5, villancico [2:09]

Sancta Maria, succurre miseris a 8, motet [3:24]

**Peter PHILIPS**

Cantate Domino a 2, motet [3:57]

Caecilia virgo a 8, motet [6:22]

Sicut misit me vivens Pater a 3, motet [3:58]

**Pedro RUIMONTE**

Virgen escogida a 5, villancico [5:28]

**Pieter CORNET**

Toccata 3. toni [4:45]

CD 2

**Mateo ROMERO (c1575-1647)**

Entre dos mansos arroyos a 4, romance [4:57]

**anon**

Como suele al blanco cisne a 3, romance [3:47]

**Richard DERING (c1580-1630)**

Fantasia a 5 [3:14]

**Pedro RUIMONTE**

Mal guardará ganado a 4, madrigal [5:02]

Esperanza tardía a 5, madrigal [13:09]

**Girolamo FRESCOBALDI (1583-1643)**

Canzon XXIX a 8 [3:18]

**Peter PHILIPS**

O sacrum convivium a 3, motet [3:05]

**Pedro RUIMONTE**

El que partir se atreve a 6, madrigal [4:46]

De vuestro divino pecho a 6, villancico [5:57]

**Peter PHILIPS**

O quam suavis est a 8 (II), motet [4:06]