

El Parnasso: La Música de Estevan Daça

In sixteenth-century Spain, the vihuela was one of the principal instruments used for the domestic performance of highly cultivated art music.

The workshops of *violeros* in Spanish cities produced thousands of instruments that were accessibly priced and bought eagerly by those who aspired to fill their homes with music of the kind that was traditionally the domain of the nobility and similar classes. The invention of music printing in the first years of the century facilitated access to repertoires that were formerly outside the reach of the urban bourgeoisie and professional classes. Through the printed page, vocal polyphony—normally performed in church or court contexts—entered their homes alongside the instrumental music of court vihuelists such as Luis Milán, Luis de Narváez and Miguel de Fuenllana.

The proliferation of such music meant also that the new bourgeois musicians, having assimilated the style of the music now available to them, also began to become creators, participants and contributors to the musical tradition of their time.

Esteban Daza was a musician of this kind, a vihuelist who today would be called an amateur but who in reality was a fine composer and musician, comparable with many of his professional peers. Esteban Daza was born in late 1537 or early 1538, the eldest son of Tomás and Juana Daza.

Esteban's musical training is unknown, but the evidence drawn from his music points to a principally self-taught musician who learnt by studying the counterpoint of vocal works, assimilating ideas from the books of other vihuelists, and through use of some of the available theoretical manuals.

Esteban was probably around thirty-eight when “El Parnasso” was published in Valladolid in 1576. Prefaced by an introduction that explains the mechanics of tablature notation—derived closely from that of Narváez—“El Parnasso” is divided into three *libros*, each devoted to a separate genre: the *libro primero* contains Daza's twenty-two original fantasias, the *libro segundo* provides intabulations of thirteen motets, and the *libro tercero* is an anthology of more than twenty Spanish secular songs, with a pair of French chansons added as a colophon.

The present programme presents all but a few of the intabulated secular vocal works of the third book, and a selection of the original fantasias from the *libro primero*.

- *Notes by Dr. John Griffiths*