



(LEMS 8003)

LAS CANTIGAS DE SANTA MARÍA
Del Rey Alfonso El Sabio (1221-1284)
RUSSELL OBERLIN, Countertenor
JOSEPH IADONE, Lute

PROLOGO

CANTIGAS 7 • 97 • 36 • 261 • 330

CANTIGAS 160 • 118 • 205 • 364 • 111 • 340

Music of the Middle Ages: Volume III - The Thirteenth Century

Originally produced by BEVERLY MERRILL • Musical Direction - SAVILLE CLARK

• Language Consultant - ERNESTO G. DA CAL

SONGS ON THE RECORDING:

The twelve songs on this recording are all taken from the 13th century Spanish collection known as the Cantigas de Santa María del Rey Alfonso el Sabio, Alfonso X, known as El Sabio, The Wise, was born in 1221, and ruled over much of Spain from 1252 until his death in 1284. His official title reads: Don Alfonso por la gracia de Dios Rey de Castilla, de Toledo, de León, de Galicia, de Sevilla, de Cordoba, de Murcia, de Jaén, y del Algarbe.

Alfonso's court was the center of much intellectual and artistic activity throughout his reign. The works produced there include many translations from the Arabic - treatises on astronomy, on chess, and a translation of the legend of Mahomet's journey to the other world - legal works, such as *Las Siete Partidas*, historical works, such as the *Estoria de España* and the general *Estoria* (an uncompleted history of the world), and religious works, such as the *Cantigas de Santa María*. These works all bear Alfonso's name, though it is doubtful that all of them were written by him personally. We know that Alfonso kept a large number of Arab, Jewish and Christian scholars, as well as artists, working at his court; and it seems more likely that in many cases, though certainly not all, he acted as a sort of editor and compiler. As far as the *Cantigas* are concerned, it is not possible to say how much of the work is his own, though no doubt a good deal of it is.

The texts of the *Cantigas de Santa María* are in Galician, a language much used in Spain for literary purposes during the Middle Ages. Their subject matter deals almost exclusively with the miracles of the Virgin Mary. In the original manuscripts, the songs are arranged in groups of ten, nine relating miracles of the virgin followed by a tenth in praise of the Virgin. The stories of these miracles were well known all over Europe at the time, and versions of them in verse and prose were written down in many countries. Some, however, seem to have been popular only in Spain, and deal with local matters. There are 403 *Cantigas de Santa María* preserved, and two smaller collections - 13 *Cantigas de Fiestas de Santa Maria* and 10 *Cantigas de Fiestas de Nuestro Señor y Otras de Santa María*, making a total of 426. All but three have music.

There has been a great deal of controversy among literary historians and musicologists concerning the origins of medieval song. Much of this controversy, particularly among musicologists, has centered around the *Cantigas de Santa María*. The principal question has been the one of Arab influence. There have been musicologists who would deny any such influence whatsoever, or refuse to accept a theory of Arab origin until some "proof" is offered - a safe statement, since the Arabs did not write down their music. In the meanwhile, these men point to what they believe is evidence of the origin of these melodies in Gregorian chant and other western liturgical music. On the other hand, some writers on the subject have gone so far as to say that the *Cantigas* are Arab melodies, composed by the Arabs in Spain, and used by Spanish poets.

Of course the *Cantigas* use many different kinds of melody, as any examination of the collection must show. It would seem some - a very small number - derive directly from western chant; a large number seem to have an indirect relation to chant but have been transformed by a uniquely Spanish kind of lyricism; a few clearly derive from popular song; but a large group, perhaps the largest of all, have no relation to chant whatsoever, nor can they be analyzed according to the western modal system. It would seem reasonable to assume that these melodies were composed with Arab models in mind, and that some of them may even be Arab melodies; further, that what we hear as uniquely Spanish lyricism is due, at least in part, to the presence of Arabs in Spain for over 500 years before these songs were written.

The songs on this record were selected with the idea of representing the different types of melodies contained in the Cantigas. It should, however, be clearly understood that any such classification according to "type" of melody is a very general one. Actually, every song in this collection (discounting the few instances where an entire melody is used a second time) is remarkably different from every other. Nevertheless, some broad basis for selection was necessary. Number 160, and to a lesser degree number 340, are of the "type" that derive directly from Gregorian chant; numbers 36, 205, and perhaps 111 are based on popular song; numbers 118, 330, and 364 seem to be based more directly on possible Arab models.

The Cantigas are strophic songs - that is to say the melody is repeated with each verse. It was decided to not include all the verses of any cantiga on this recording, since the number of verses can be anywhere from five to thirty. But rather than record only one verse of each cantiga, two and occasionally three have been recorded, for, in order to understand the principles of strophic song, it is most important to hear different sets of words to a repeated melody.

The texts with music of the Cantigas are preserved in three manuscripts written in the 13th and 14th centuries. The edition of the music and its transcription into modern notation here used is that of Higinio Anglés, and it should be noted that Anglés differs with the opinions stated in this article and feels that a specifically Arab influence on the Cantigas is negligible. There is no indication in the original manuscripts as to how these songs were accompanied; through it is probable that they were performed in a variety of ways. The accompaniments for lute used on this record are by myself, and the use of finger cymbals in Cantigas 36 and 205 are the suggestion of Mr. Russell Oberlin.

--- SAVILLE CLARK

TRACKS AND TIMES:

1. Prologo - 2:33
2. Cantigas 7 - 5:21
3. Cantigas 97 - 2:40
4. Cantigas 36 - 1:08
5. Cantigas 261 - 4:52
6. Cantigas 330 - 1:35
7. Cantigas 160 - 1:32
8. Cantigas 118 - 2:52
9. Cantigas 205 - 1:27
10. Cantigas 364 - 3:47
11. Cantigas 111 - 1:42
12. Cantigas 340 - 7:09

TRACKS, NOTES AND LYRICS

PROLOGO • TRACK 1

This is the prologue of the
Cantigas de Santa Maria, stating the
things necessary to a good troubadour.

Seeing the matter of the troubador
Is the dwelling place and progenitor
Of understanding, the inheritor
Of all true poetry must understand
The think whereof he speaks, executor
And maker both, he wields a double hand.

While my own poems are perhaps ill-planned
In some points, still I propose to expand
Upon a thing or two I do know, and,
Through powers such as I have been conferred,
May God, the Source of Knowledge, stand
Me in good stead (o poet, hear His Word) . . .

Alfonso would like to raise the Virgin, and so he begs Her to allow him to become Her troubadour and sing Her miracles. By doing this he will amend his past songs to worldly ladies. Mary's love is the highest, and he who renounces evil will never lose Her favor. He intends to serve Her faithfully, and, if She likes his songs and grants him the rewards. She gives to those She loves, many other troubadours will sing Her praises too.

CANTIGA 7 • TRACK 2

How Holy Mary took a pregnant
abbess who fell asleep crying on
Her altar under Her care.

Unto Holy Mary we
Owe both piety and love;
For She can forestall evil;
Those who love Her well go free
Though intermittently
Held up by the Devil.

I am honored to bring,
By way of illustrating,
To your attention now,
A miraculous thing
The Mother of the King
Of Heaven, who knows how!,
Performed in a convent;

The abbess only meant
To do good; but a man
>From Bologna had sent
Her from him pregnant;
She was his companion

Unto Holy Mary, etc. . . .
The nuns were overjoyed,
Not being devoid
Of an instinct for sin,
And the abbess annoyed
Them, for she employed
The strictest discipline.
And to cast a first stone,
They made her story known,
And the Bishop was sent
For and came from Cologne,
And she went in alone
Before him, radiant . . .

Unto Holy Mary, etc. . . .

The bishop told her that he was aware of her predicament and expected her to confess it and face the consequences. But the abbess quickly went to pray to the Mother of God, and, as in a dream, the Virgin delivered her of the child and took it to another city to be reared. The abbess awoke and went back to the bishop who examined her very carefully. Upon finding no basis for the accusation, he praised God and scolded the nuns very irately.

CANTIGA 97 • TRACK 3

How Holy Mary saved a king's
favorite from death at the hands
of enemies who were trying to ruin him.

Consider how the Virgin seems always to succor,
to succor:

And she will benefit the distressed forever,
forever.

The next miracle to which I'll refer
Was performed for a Canetan man, Her
Servant and the King's favorite. Slander
Had brought his very life into danger; Consider
This miracle, which supports my refrain.
Consider how the Virgin, etc. . . .

The gossip was set up in such a train

That the king wanted to have him explain
And immediately ent'a chamberlain
To arraign
His favorite, who arrived in great pain,
Weeping and praying as much as he could . . .
Consider how the Virgin, etc. . . .

The favorite went to church with a rich piece of cloth as an offering and pledged himself to the Virgin. Then he appeared before the king, and, defending himself against the false accusations, suggested that the king send a trusted man to investigate the charges. This the king did, and truth was established. His favor with the king increased, and the slanderers were discredited.

CANTIGA 36 • TRACK 4

How Holy Mary appeared at night on
the mast of a ship going to Brittany and
saved it from danger.

Let us love Our Lady, for see how She doubles
Our instinct for refuge in sea storms and troubles!

And now to illustrate, I'll right away acquaint
You with what She did in Brittan; no other saint
Could have done it! Once it happened that a merchant
Ship was there on the Sea. A storm was imminent,
Such as has wrecked many ships and shattered
their hulls.
Let us love our Lady, etc. . . .

The sky became clouded, and every element
Made the night darker. Still the merchants
were bent
On profits, and, as with you, that primed
their judgment.
but yet they lost hope that, under the firmament,
They ever again would pull into littorials . . .

Let us love our Lady, etc. . . .

On seeing such danger, the men, in their anguish, began to invoke all the Saints by name for protection. Then a very virtuous priest who was aboard reprimanded them for their folly: among so many saints they had forgotten to mention the name of Holy Mary - the one who could really help. They joined their hearts and their voices and begged the Virgin for succour. Then they saw a great light above the mast, and the wind ceased, and the sea calmed its fury - and they reached port safely.

CANTIGA 261 • TRACK 5

Of a virtuous woman who wished more
than anything else to be shown righteous men
and women of exemplary lives.

He who wishes to see the only son
Of God and His Mother in this lifetime,
Should strive to render them a full portion
Of pleasure, avoiding a life of crime.

I want to tell of a miracle wherein
A good woman was blessed as an answer
To her prayer to see good men and
women and honor them.
The Matchless One brought her
To such people, for such is the power
Unequaled and the grace of the Virgin.

He who wishes to see, etc. . . .
And now I'll show that this is genuine;
A holy bishop, the deliverer
Of the woman, by grace of the Virgin,
Came to that land, and, seeing this preacher,
She resolved to be his parishioner
And submit herself to his discipline . . .

He who wishes to see, etc. . . .

The bishop preached a beautiful sermon, and she went to him and told him her wish. He advised her to go into seclusion and fasting for nine days. At the end of that period, she had a heavenly vision: a great stream of light entered her room, and in it she saw the Saints and angels in procession, and then Jesus Christ and His Mother. She asked Them to take her to heaven - whereupon she fell dead. The bishop had a revelation of what had happened. He went to the woman's house and found her body in an aura of sanctity. He ordered the miracle recorded in writing, praising God and Holy Mary.

CANTIGA 330 • TRACK 6

In praise of Holy Mary.
Who has immortal sanctity
Beyond eventuality?

Mary, the Mother of God Our Lord,
The Mother of God Our Lord,
The Mother of Our Savior and Our God.

Whom Gabriel addressed, "Hail Mary!
"It is decreed that Thou shalt be,

"Mary, the Mother of God Our Lord." . . .
"The Mother of God Our Lord,"
"The Mother of Our Savior and Our god."

CANTIGA 160 • TRACK 7

In praise of Holy Mary.
If anyone wants a lady
To praise, the best he can assay
Is Holy Mary.

This kind of praise comes easily,
For God's child sought identity
With Holy Mary.
And this blessed maternity
Was fulfilled in virginity
By Holy Mary . . .

CANTIGA 118 • TRACK 8

How Holy Mary restored a dead child
who was brought before Her altar in Saragossa to life.

Through Her who is the Mother of Our Lord,
The lives of dad infants can be restored.

Now I shall tell you of a miracle
Performed by the Virgin, as I have learned,
In Saragossa, where invincible
Death claimed each child a certain woman earned,

Through Her who is the Mother, etc. . . .
>From nothingness to life; and she would rage
Bitterly at her husband, complaining
Horribly, But she made a child's image
Of wax, which she bought herself, hoping. . . .

Through Her who is the Mother, etc.
She offered the wax image to the Virgin, but her next three children were stillborn. When her fourth child died at birth, her anguish was extreme, and she prayed tearfully, but full of faith, to the Mother of God for a miracle; whereupon the child was brought back to life. The woman then took the restored child to church, and deposited the wax image at the altar of the Virgin, praising the miraculous glory of the Queen of Heaven.

CANTIGA 205 • TRACK 9

How Holy Mary saved a Moorish woman,
who was sitting on a tower between two battlements,
holding her child in her arms. The tower fell, and
neither died nor suffered harm - and this happened
because Christians had prayed for their safety.

What the devoted ask in prayer
The Virgin gives with happiness,
And an object is safest where
She can watch it in all events.

There are two main things that win Her,
A full measure of devotion,
And this rendered, as is proper,
In a public celebration;
We know that She is capable
If before She acts as doctor
Her worshipers are visible
Appealing unto Her in prayer.

What the devoted ask in prayer, etc. . . .

If I may have your attention,
I shall sing of a miracle
Of the Blessed One's invention,
And surely most remarkable.
Think how Mary's name advances,
For those men were honorable,
Who witnessed these circumstances,
And they said it was wonderful . . .

What the devoted ask in prayer, etc. . . .

A castle on the Moorish border was being besieged by a great army of Christians. The walls were stormed and destroyed and the defenders had taken refuge in a strong tower, which the besiegers had set fire to. A Moorish woman, fleeing the flames and smoke, climbed to the top of the tower, and sat between two battlements, protecting her child in her arms. On seeing them, the Christians were reminded of the Virgin and the Holy Child, and, with pity in their hearts, they begged Mary to spare them, even though they were pagans. Then a great miracle took place: the tower fell, but mother and child alighted gently in a nearby meadow. As a result they became Christians, and received the holy waters of baptism.

CANTIGA 364 • TRACK 10

How St. Mary of the Port protected thirty men who were digging the foundation for Her church when a tower came crashing down on them - but they suffered no harm.

If anyone serves the Virgin,
He needn't avoid danger,
For She will be his talisman
And his cautionary measure.

Serving the Terrestrial Sea
Is the great port that bears the name
Of the Port of the Glorious Lady
Near the Sea of Biblical fame
Which holds the earth in its bosom
And encircles the entire world;
Here the Virgin's visitation
Was by a miracle adorned.

If anyone serves the Virgin, etc. . . .

They were putting up a church there
Which was to be dedicated
To Our Lady. And whatever
Needed to be done, someone did,
And very willingly, for they
Wanted to lay the foundations
Very deep and very steady,
And they built with very hard stones . . .

If anyone serves the Virgin,

Thirty workers were digging at the bottom of a deep ditch when a tower built on soft ground caved in on them - yet now one of them was even slightly hurt. They were doing voluntary work for the building of a church to the Virgin, and Glorious Mary, in whose service they were, protected them. After the accident, they worked with renewed enthusiasm and devotion, and, in a very short time, the church was finished - the most beautiful in all Extremadura.

CANTIGA 111 • TRACK 11

How an ordained priest, devoted to Holy Mary,
drowned in the river that crosses Paris; and how,
after three days, Holy Mary took him from the river
and brought him back to life.

At all times the Virgin's seal
Elevates the commonweal.

The problem need not be timely,
And often the sick feel healthy
At an odd moment, just as we
Are freed of guilt by quick repeal.

At all times, etc. . . .

And to put this explicitly,
She once quite miraculously
Attended upon a priestly
Man; and how my song shall reveal . . .

At all times, etc. . . .

The priest's lecherousness had really taken hold of him - yet he never forgot to pray regularly and devoutly to Holy Mary. One night, on his way to sin, he had to cross the Seine - which he never did: his boat overturned and he drowned, whereupon the devil grabbed his soul to carry it to eternal fire. But, before he died, the priest had prayed to the Virgin, and She came to the rescue, chasing the devil away and bringing the man back to life - after letting his body remain three days at the bottom of the river.

CANTIGA 340 • TRACK 12
In praise of Holy Mary.

Daughter of God and divinely
Married Virgin Mother, holy
And precious and noble: Surely
These things endow Thee too richly
For poetry.

For God is the moon and the day,
Yet we are blind naturally,
But Thou art dawn, the agency
Through whom we see them finally.

Daughter of God, etc. . . .

Dawn of dawns, peremptorily
Confounding contrariety,
The dark shall lose ascendancy,
When Thou hast Thy majority;
And poverty,

Daughter of God, etc. . . .
In which men live, and by which we

Are scourged for Eve's insanity,
Must yield to Thy priority
In all things pure and womanly . . .

Daughter of God and divinely
Married Virgin Mother, holy
And previous and noble: Surely
These things endow Thee too richly
For poetry.

RUSSELL OBERLIN

Russell Oberlin was born in Ohio. He received a scholarship to study at the Juilliard School of music in New York City, from which he was graduated in 1951. During his performing career, Mr. Oberlin appeared both as the tenor and the countertenor solo artist with the Cantata Singers, the Collegium Musicum, the American Opera Society, and the New York Philharmonic Symphony in Handel's Messiah under Leonard Bernstein. He appeared at Covent Garden in the roll of Oberon in Britten's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, has recorded and performed as soloist with the Robert Shaw Chorale and, perhaps most famously, with Noah Greenberg's legendary New York Pro Musica Antiqua, of which he was a founding member.

A true high tenor, he has been called America's greatest countertenor, and is included in the Oxford Dictionary of Music. He unquestionably ranks among the greatest voices of the twentieth century.

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