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The Orchestra of New Spain would like to express  
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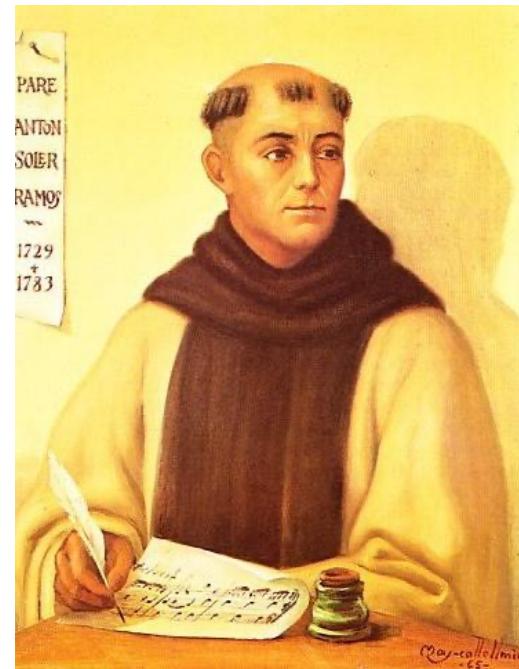
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**Epiphany at Christ the King**  
*Padre Antonio Soler and the Christmas Villancico*



SUNDAY, JANUARY 4, 2026 | 6 PM  
CHRIST THE KING CATHOLIC CHURCH  
DALLAS

## PROGRAM

*Ding Dong! Merrily on High*

16c French Arr. Charles Wood

*Los Quatro Elementos / The Four Elements*

Esteban Salas  
(1725-1803)

Our culture is so unfamiliar with ancient ideas about the universe that it is difficult to grasp why the poet of this villancico could think of no more extreme and reverent simile than to compare the Christ Child to elemental matter. Even in the late 18th c., most Europeans believed that everything could be reduced to four basic components: fluids, minerals, gases, and heat; or as they said, water, earth, air, and fire.

*No Hay Zagal Como Gilillo / There is no Shepherd* Juan Gutierrez de Padilla  
(1590-1664)

In this villancico, which describes the musical feats of Gil at the manger, the usual shepherds do not tell their story in the "pastoral" style, a literary version of idealized country folk music, but they show off their unexpectedly fancy vocabulary with an interminable series of words that are accented on the third syllable from the end, like SYL-la-ble in English. (See the lines below, which attempt to copy the effect: "Hush anything that's bellicose.") This produces some rather odd poetry (like the description of the damp straw in the manger in the second copla) and tongue-twisters. The librettist is poking fun at the contemporary fashion in poetry called culteranismo, which featured obscure vocabulary and pseudo-Latin syntax. Here, the effect is comical in music from rustics, no doubt sung with a country accent, in the style of the rowdy jácara, originally a satirical ballad and dance for ruffians.

*Bartolillo con la Danza prima*

Antonio Soler  
(1510- 1570)

This is another piece that features a stereotyped country man, who speaks with an Asturian accent, which Castilians always found amusing. Bartolillo's regional folk costume would have identified him, and apparently the actor was wearing a shaggy wig of some kind (melena gacha ), which the old dictionaries say describes the hair that hangs over the eyes. He teaches the little shepherds one of the best-known folk dances, the danza prima, which was performed to singing. The theological puns on Adam's "error" (yerro) and iron (hierro) and on "ave" ("Hail Mary") and "ave" (bird) are old chestnuts. As usual, the church would have had a manger scene, and the choristers, dressed as shepherds (male and female), all go to Bethlehem to see the Christ Child.

*Gil, pues al cantar / "Sing, Gil"*

Pedro Ruimonte  
(1565-1627)

The "conceit" of this villancico is the contrast between singing and weeping. In Spanish, a rooster "sings," and the expression "otro gallo cantará" means "things are going to be different." Here it alludes to Matthew 26:34: "Jesus said ...before the cock crows, thou shalt deny me thrice."

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### Albricias Pastores

Juan Gutierrez de Padilla  
The metaphor of this villancico is a military one. The Christ Child captures the fortress of evil with mystical weapons. When the enemies surrender, a messenger of peace (John the Baptist) enters, then three pagan castle wardens (the Magi) arrive to hand over the fortress. Darkness turns to light (the birth of the Savior), and golden dawn shines on the Holy Mother, who is watching over the manger. Other typical stylistic traits are the pairing of opposites (child/giant), words with double meanings (buenas pascuas, a good time, and pascua, Easter), and poetic substitutes for common objects: the Christ Child's tears are pearls, he is the Orient.

### Temeroso aquilón si loco

Francisco Courcelle

*Eric Laine*

(1705-1788)

Descriptions of the stable in Bethlehem in verse and song constantly allude to the cold that the Christ Child must have suffered. This cantata elevates the trite references by addressing the north wind himself (Aquila in Latin), commanding him to calm his winds, seeing that even the monster from the underworld (Avernus in Latin) worships the Christ Child.

### *Por Hacer Fiesta / To Celebrate*

anon, Bolivia

This charming villancico has something in common with the English carol, "Tomorrow shall be my dancing day." The birth of Christ makes the universe want to join the dance, which expresses the world's love for its Savior and symbolizes in its endless circling God's infinite greatness.

### *Venite Exsultemus: Lauda Sion*

anon, Bolivia

Response to the invitation to praise the Lord, comes in the form of the 13th c. Eucharistic hymn, "Lauda Sion," composed by St. Thomas of Aquinas. (Note that this is the century in which King Alfonso the Wise was composing the 400 Cantigas de Santa Maria heard in last season Convivencia concert.). In it Zion is encouraged to praise the true Shepherd.

### *Barricades Mysterieuses*

François Couperin

*On the portative organ*

### *Hueco laurel frondoso / Bare, branching laurel*

Francisco Courcelle

*Elizabeth McGee*

(1705-1788)

Apollo, also called Phoebus ("radiant") and identified with the sun, was also a god of healing. He pursued the nymph Daphne, who was turned into a laurel tree to escape his unwanted attentions, and the god took the laurel or bay tree as his symbol. Adonis was the son of Myrrha, turned into the myrrh tree, and the sap of the tree is, of course, associated with the gift of one of the Three Kings. The convoluted poem on which this villancico is based uses these mythological elements in its metaphors, describing the birth of Jesus

*Un Angel, y el Demonio / An Angel and the Devil*

This villancico is an example of the cantatas composed for the festive midnight service of Christmas eve, when the church permitted a certain amount of levity. The readings and antiphons were divided into "nocturns," an ancient word for the sections of the night time liturgy. For this nocturn, we can safely assume that the angelic singers and the ranting devil were appropriately costumed and behaved in character. The text not only quotes the first two lines of the *Te deum* but is in places a sort of paraphrase of the hymn.

*El Cielo Y Sus Estrellas/ The Sky and Its Stars*

Esteban Salas

*A Belen se van corriendo*

Antonio Soler

Boys of the chapel use their musical training, solfa, the Spanish do-re-mi, to serenade the Baby Jesus with an exercise, interspersed with bits of the hymns *Te Deum* and *Sanctus*. They tell Jesus that they have learned music the old-fashioned way: with beatings, but now they use solfa. Painting a vivid picture of their poverty: they travel not on horses but on musical notes and feed on notes and rests. They next serenade the donkey that has carried Mary and Jesus to Bethlehem. The boys conclude with the annual request: the Christmas tip (*aguinaldo*) to assist their guardian angels.

*Torches*

Galician

**ORCHESTRA OF NEW SPAIN**

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Elizabeth McGee  
Laura Bray

*nass*

Hawkins Hale Burns  
Tim Johnson

*violin 1*

Kristin Van Cleve  
Junsoo Park  
Ha Dang

*bass*

Michael Lelevich

*castanets*

Laurel Ornish

**THE ORCHESTRA & CHORUS:**

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*tenor*

Eric Laine  
Francisco Bedoy

*narrator*

Sienna Castaneda Abott

*cello*

Sydney ZumMallen

*violin 2*

Inga Kroll  
Jackson Hardman

*guitar*

Noé García Jacinto

*portative organ*

Elliot Figg

**PROGRAM NOTES**

It is quite amazing that the beauty, joy, rhythm and allegories of the birth of Jesus contained in music that you are hearing this evening are only now starting to emerge from centuries of disuse as they lay in various national and regional libraries and archives. Fortunately, they were maintained in manuscript form in those repositories where easily available they are being brushed off, examined and brought to life as you hear in this concert. The 130 villancicos of Padre Antonio Soler found in the library of the enormous, majestic church of El Escorial, Felipe II's palace-monastery-pantheon, are the most celebrated and compelling—musically and literary—of the genre. You hear three examples this evening. Over time we have shared with our audiences stories of the Preacher and the Astrologer and The Grinder and a Peddler (arguing who is the closest to God!), The Portuguese (why go all the way to Bethlehem when we've our own Belén right here!?), and the countless villancicos on the interaction of various shepherds and shepherdesses with the Holy Family. Of particular significance to me was the comment by Father Larry Pichard, pastor of the Guadalupe Cathedral, on the theological grounding of the Soler's villancicos, on the ability of this musician to put together stories that so clearly illuminate the Christmas story in a compelling narrative that the common man, as well as the choir boys, could understand.