Salas - Baroque cantatas from Santiago de Cuba (1998)

1.Qué dulce melodía (7:18) 2.Resuenen armoniosos (5:45) 3.Vayan unas especies (7:57) 4.Pues la fábrica de un templo (10:04) 5.Respirad, O mortales (5:30) 6.Oigan una nueva (6:58) 7.Escuchen el concento (6:39) Exaudi Choir of Cuba María Felicia Pérez - conductor (choir master)

Esteban Salas, contemporary with Haydn, was born in Havana but in 1764 moved to the rival centre of Santiago de Cuba as organist of the tiny ‘cathedral’ there. This was destroyed in an earthquake three years later, and Salas devoted great efforts to fund-raising for its rebuilding and to composing large quantities of music for it. He was disgracefully betrayed by the authorities, who failed to refund his own money that he had expended to enlarge the church’s pathetically modest musical resources, and he died in penury. Today hailed as the first Cuban classical composer, he is represented here (for the first time) by a handful of two-, three- or four-part villancicos, with solos, nearly all dating from the 1790s. (“Villancicos”, usually translated as “carols”, are mostly ternary in form.) The style is markedly Neapolitan (Salas seems to have seen scores by the leading masters from Naples – which then belonged to Spain), with lively invention for the accompanying violins. Pastorals adopt the familiar 6/8 metre, and Una nave mercantil contains a brief fugue.

This is an interesting repertoire to have uncovered, even if the performances, by somewhat unsophisticated voices (though described as professionals), are too often trudging and syllabic, and the recording, made in an over-resonant church, sometimes leaves the strings too far in the background (particularly in Un musiquito nuevo).' ---Lionel Salter, gramophone.co.uk

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