

POST ONE



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# Francisco Velez, a musician in sixteenth century Évora

To write about musicians, composers, or even chapel masters in Évora during the sixteenth century frequently represents a challenge, to say the least, due to the scarcity of sources and accounts regarding their professional careers or their own biographies. The case of the singer, composer, and master Francisco Velez is no exception being part of a group of musicians of whom we know extraordinarily little today.

Velez appears in the context of the first reported polyphonic musicians at the service of Évora Cathedral. There is an account that places the Spanish composer and theorist Mateus d'Aranda as the Cathedral's chapel master in 1528 (Alegria, 1973: 25) with a group of singers under his responsibility. Velez's name first appears at the head

of a group of fourteen singers under Aranda's responsibility listed in the Visitation of the Bishop D. Afonso to the Cathedral in 1537 (Alegria, 1985: 98). The Visitation document established a regiment for these singers which were obliged to attend at the choir and chapel lectern every day and feast that required their presence. They were also obliged to participate in all processions in and outside the Cathedral. Part of their duties was to sing the Divine Offices and to be obedient to the chapel master in all that his demands, as also to the Cathedral precentor's (Alegria, 1985: 98-99).



Image 1. Chapel of the Bishop D. Pedro IV in the cloister of Évora Cathedral (Author's photo)

In 1544 Mateus d'Aranda left Évora Cathedral and his duties as chapel master were divided between two of the chapel singers. The post of chapel master was entrusted to the singer Manuel Dias, who was in service of the Cathedral at least since the 1537 Visitation. The teaching duties – which began to be identified as attributed to a

*mestre da Claustra*<sup>1</sup> – were attributed to Francisco Velez. As master of the *Claustra*, Velez was obliged to teach plainchant, polyphony, and counterpoint to the choirboys, singers, and other clergymen or laymen in the chapel of the founder of the Cloister daily, two hours during the morning and two in the afternoon. Exception was made to the Sundays and holy days. There would be no lessons in the mornings and afternoons when the chapel was to perform polyphony (*canto dorgao*) which would require the presence of the choirboys and adult singers (Gusmão, 1964: 107).



Image 2. Évora Cathedral. Central nave (Author's photo).

Under the rule of the Archbishop Cardinal D. Henrique,

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<sup>1</sup> The term *Claustra* (or *Crasta* depending on the orthography) is applied to the teaching because the music lessons took place in the funerary chapel of the Bishop D. Pedro IV, in the Cathedral cloister.

Francisco Velez received an annual salary of 25,000 reis the first payment appearing in the Cardinal's treasury book (*Livro da Fazenda*) in 1542 (Gusmão, 1964: 107). His salary was subsequently raised in 12,000 reis for teaching at the *Claustra* in October 1547. He was, again, raised more 5,000 reis to these 12,000 in April 1549. Payments to Velez appear in the Cardinal's treasury book until 1553, the last year of payments registered in the book (Gusmão, 1964: 107).

One interesting aspect of Francisco Velez life comes from a *Livro de Pitanças* of the Cathedral Chapter, particularly the one referring to 1561. These books of *pitanças* (contributions) would register all the pigs, chickens, rams, cheese, and hay that would come from the farms own by the Chapter. It was also used to record the rents that would be paid in chickens from the houses that had cultivated garden. That was the case of Francisco Velez that lived in a house rented to the canon Diogo Mendes de Vasconcelos, located in the *Rua do Raimundo*, to whom he had to pay two chickens as rent (Alegria, 1973: 34).



Image 3. *Rua do Raimundo*, Évora (Author's photo).

As did his predecessor in the duties to teach music to the choirboys and the Cathedral personnel Mateus d'Aranda, Francisco Velez seemed to have the intention of publish in print two music treatises. This is suggested by the privilege he obtained from King D. Sebastião which was recognized in a charter (*alvará*) from 8 March 1563. In this document Velez, resident in the city of Évora, was given a five-year privilege to print a plainchant treatise, and another treatise on *canto dorgão* and counterpoint that he had made (Alegria, 1973: 33). No traces of these treatises have been found which suggests that Velez obtained the privilege but was not able to print them during his lifetime.

Another glimpse into Velez's household comes from the Cathedral Chapter notes and parochial registers. Velez was father-in-law of Francisco Freire, one of the Cathedral organists. In the session of 9 November 1582, the Chapter decided to hire Freire, identified as son-in-law of the master of the *Claustra* Francisco Velez, and Baltazar Estaço, son of the former chapel master André Nunes, following the death of the Cathedral organist Manuel Barbança (Alegria, 1973: 34). One interesting aspect of this note besides the identification of Freire is the use of the present tense to identify Velez, which strongly suggests that he was still alive in 1582, in opposition to the use of the past tense when referring to André Nunes, which points towards he was already deceased by that time.

On 22 January 1584, the priest André Fernandes received a certain Francisco Velez, a stone mason from India (*natural das partes da india*) and former servant of Francisco Velez master of the *Claustra* resident in *Rua da Oliveira*, and Domingas Fernandes, *molher baça* (a black woman) also resident in the same street daughter of Rodrigo Pais and Brites Fernandes (both deceased), to be married at the Cathedral (Espanca, 1948: 272). This is one of the rare cases of

musicians in Évora of whom we know part of their household.

On the 5 and 8 June 1587 sessions the Chapter decided to accept as tenant to Velez's house António Guinara, who presented himself as son and heir of the master of the *Claustra*. The Chapter, presided by the canon Pedro Rodrigues, besides accepting the new tenancy also pardoned the years of rent that were still to be paid (Espanca, 1948: 141). The identification of Guinara as heir and the unpaid rents suggests that Velez was already deceased by that time.

Francisco Velez was a master that, due to the nature of his post as Évora Cathedral master of the *Claustra*, was intrinsically linked to music theory as suggests his intention to publish two treatises. He was also a composer although only one work has survived to this day. It is a four-voice *Alleluia* setting that is preserved in a manuscript polyphony choirbook<sup>2</sup> that belonged to the feminine Cistercian monastery of St Peter and St Paul of Arouca, at the Centre-North of Portugal. The work present at the Arouca choirbook is set for two *superius*, *tenor*, and *bassus* (c1, c1, c3, and c4 clefs). The plainchant melody is set in the tenor part using *breves*, the other three voices developing an intricate counterpoint texture.

In short, although the information on his life and career is scarce, from fragmented references we can have an idea of the presence of Francisco Velez in sixteenth century Évora. He is one of the rare cases of musicians of whom we know their residence in the city as well as some family and personal relations. Although only one musical composition has survived to this day, assuming that he remained in the post of master of the *Claustra* and singer at the Cathedral, performing in the chapel and teaching the choirboys, for about four

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<sup>2</sup> The manuscript P-AR Res. Ms. 032, ff. 56v-57r. Available at the [Portuguese Early Music Database](#). The work is also preserved in the manuscript P-Pm MM 40, ff. 144v-145r.

decades, and had prepared two music treatises, which implied a deep knowledge of music theory, we believe that he can be placed among the most significant music masters active at the Cathedral of Évora throughout the sixteenth century.

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