

JUAN ARRIAGA

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Juan Crisostomo Jacobo Antonio de Arriaga y Balzola was a Basque composer born in Bibao on 27 January 1806, which would have been Mozart's 50th birthday. He has been called the Spanish Mozart, a ridiculous expression. Why was not Mozart called the German Arriaga? Presumably because he lived before Arriaga! Comparisons like this are odious.

I have often wondered why Spanish people have so many names!

Arriaga showed much promise in music from a very early age and, by the time, he went to study in Paris he was an accomplished musician and all his tutors were amazed at his talent. He arrived in Paris in November 1822 and studied the violin with Pierre Baillot and composition with the great Cherubini.

At the Paris Conservatoire he became an assistant teacher in Joseph Fetis class.

For a man who lived for only 20 years, dying of a lung condition on 17 January 1826, he wrote music of real quality including a Symphony (1824), three string quartets (c. 1822), an opera *The Happy Slaves*, now lost, but the overture survives, an Octet, including a part for trumpet and another for guitar, a Nonet, a Mass, a Stabat Mater, a Salve Regina, cantatas and motets. His music for the Catholic church was much admired. The Stabat Mater of 1821 for two tenors, bass and orchestra is simply gorgeous. A Paris music professor said to Arriaga, "You do not write music. You are music!"

Listen to the second movement of the String Quartet no 2 for another example of gorgeous music.

In his music, there is an elegance and refinement and, usually, a very cheerful mood. This makes him more akin to Haydn than Mozart. There is life and vitality in Arriaga's music!

There is a growing number of musicians and music lovers who prefer Arriaga to Mozart and I can understand why.

There is also another highly commendable aspect of Arriaga's music. It is not littered by ornamentation.

If he had lived, even another 20 years, what other splendid works would he have written?

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