

NAXOS

**Luys
MILÁN**
(c. 1500-c. 1561)

**El Maestro,
Libro 1 (1536)**

**José Antonio Escobar,
Vihuela de mano**



El Maestro, Libro 1 (1536)

Works for Solo Vihuela

Fantasías de consonancias

1	Fantasia I	Tono 1. Compas apresurado	1:44
2	Fantasia II	Tono 1. Compas apresurado	1:38
3	Fantasia III	Tono 1. Compas algo apresurado	1:59
4	Fantasia IV	Tono 2. Compas apresurado	1:19
5	Fantasia V	Tono 2. Compas batido	2:06
6	Fantasia VI	Tonos 1 & 2. No tempo indication	2:18
7	Fantasia VII	Tono 3. Compas apresurado	2:03
8	Fantasia VIII	Tono 4. Compas apresurado	2:05
9	Fantasia IX	Tonos 3 & 4. Compas apresurado	2:14

Fantasías de consonancias y redobles

10	Fantasia X	Tonos 1 & 2. Las consonancias a espacio y los redobles apriesa	3:12
11	Fantasia XI	Tonos 1 & 2. Las consonancias a espacio y los redobles apriesa	3:01
12	Fantasia XII	Tonos 3 & 4. Las consonancias a espacio y los redobles apriesa	2:31
13	Fantasia XIII	Tono 1. Las consonancias a espacio y los redobles apriesa	1:45
14	Fantasia XIV	Tonos 4 & 3. Las consonancias a espacio y los redobles apriesa	1:23
15	Fantasia XV	Tonos 5 & 6. Las consonancias a espacio y los redobles apriesa	3:24
16	Fantasia XVI	Tonos 5 & 6. Las consonancias a espacio y los redobles apriesa	2:49
17	Fantasia XVII	Tonos 5 & 6. Las consonancias a espacio y los redobles apriesa	2:37
18	Fantasia XVIII	Tonos 7 & 8. Las consonancias a espacio y los redobles apriesa	3:12

Fantasías de consonancias

19	Fantasia XIX	Tono 5. [No tempo indication]	3:56
20	Fantasia XX	Tono 6. [No tempo indication]	4:02
21	Fantasia XXI	Tono 7. [No tempo indication]	2:39
22	Fantasia XXII	Tono 8. Ni muy a espacio ni muy apriesa	2:52

6 Pavanas

23	Pavana I	Tonos 1 & 2. Compas algo apresurado	2:18
24	Pavana II	Tonos 3 & 4. Compas algo apresurado	2:40
25	Pavana III	Tonos 5 & 6. Compas algo apresurado	2:04
26	Pavana IV	Tonos 7 & 8. Compas algo apresurado	2:04
27	Pavana V	Tono 8. La bella Franceschina. Compas algo apresurado	0:49
28	Pavana VI	Tono 8. Compas algo apresurado	1:23

17:25

23:53

13:29

11:18

Luys Milán (c. 1500-c. 1561)

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Published in Valencia in 1536, Luys Milán's *Libro de música de vihuela de mano intitulado El Maestro* is the oldest surviving collection of vihuela music. It is remarkable sophisticated music of great beauty that reveals an instrumental tradition already in full flourish. The names and reputations of earlier vihuelists, Luys de Guzmán (d. 1528) for example, are well known but none of their music has survived. Only one piece of vihuela music is known from before Milán's time, copied anonymously on the flyleaf of a book published in 1510 now in the British Library in London. It is too brief and elementary to be a useful indicator of the vihuela's music before Milán.

Contradictory evidence still obscures Luys Milán's exact identity. He was probably born in the first decade of the sixteenth century into a Valencian noble family who had been the lords of Massalavés since the Middle Ages. Most of the biographical information about Milán comes from both his vihuela book and two other books written by him. The most illuminating is *El Cortesano*, a book written in the shadow of Castiglione's book of the same name, and not published until 1561 even though it describes Milán's life in Valencia at the court of Ferdinand, Duke of Calabria, and Germaine de Foix in the 1530s. From the autobiographical descriptions in *El Cortesano*, a portrait emerges of Milán not as an employee, but a noble member of the court entrusted with the entertainment of the ladies who resided in it. From Milán's own testimony we learn that this included story telling, singing songs to the accompaniment of the vihuela, and playing court games, perhaps of the kind that are depicted in another little book that he authored for the purpose and that was printed under the title of *Libro de motes de Damas y Caballeros* in 1535.

Even though there have been renewed attempts in recent years to resolve the conundrums surrounding Milán's biography, all have failed to come to definitive conclusions for the reason that there are at least three men of the same name at the Valencian court in the 1530s and it has been impossible to distinguish between

them. They were all probably related: the vihuelist, his father and a cousin. Given these uncertainties, it is impossible to affirm beyond doubt that the vihuelist's mother was Violant Eixarch, niece of the Borgia pope Alexander VI, or that our Luys Milán was a priest who died in 1559 after several years of marriage to Anna Mercader by whom he had a daughter named Violant Anna.

Extrovert, charming and of strong character, Milán's music is immediate and irresistible. It also demonstrates a maturity that suggests that it might represent an older, well-established tradition. In style and sound, it is readily distinguishable from the works of any other known composer of music for the vihuela or lute. This could possibly be simply a mark of the composer's individuality or, alternatively, due to the fact that it represents an early sixteenth-century style that is otherwise undocumented. Perhaps Milán's music is of a style that was known throughout all of Spain, although it might equally represent a more regional style particular to Aragonese Valencia, and in some way linked to the performance traditions of the Italian *improvisatori* active during the preceding decades at the Aragonese court in Naples. It bears no traces of the style of the Italian virtuoso Francesco da Milano who left his mark on nearly all subsequent vihuela music. This new Italian influence was first recognised by Luys de Narváez who, in his 1538 publication *Los seys libros del delphin*, declared that the music included in it, inspired by Francesco da Milano whom he probably had met in Rome, was a new style never previously heard in Spain. American musicologist John Ward in his 1953 thesis on the vihuela aptly described Milán's music as "a bridge between the improvisatory style of the Petrucci and Attaignant lutenists and the technically more mature style of the Francesco da Milano generation".

Milán was a musician who knew his instrument inside out, who had a natural gift for communicating through performance, and who had an instinctive familiarity with the art music of his time, probably without having had an

extensive formal musical training. Milán was both a singer and instrumentalist, an improviser who composed as he played, in real time. In the prefatory text of *El Maestro*, Milán explains that the compositions in the book originated in improvisation, that they were composed directly on the vihuela and then written down.

The solo instrumental works in *El Maestro* comprise forty fantasias, four *tentos* and six *pavanas*. The fantasias are freely constructed works built as an assemblage of short episodes. They are analogous to works of prose: short narrative stories that divide into chapters, smaller paragraphs and individual sentences. They are made coherent simply by their narrative continuity rather than any thematic or structural principle. The small units or episodes are drawn from a repository of improvisatory formulae that Milán probably accumulated over a long time. Unlike later vihuela music that is built heavily upon the principles of imitative counterpoint derived from vocal polyphony, Milán's great skill was to create a musical fabric that outwardly appears to be based on these principles, but using simpler constructs that give the impression of being much more complex than they really are. There are very few composers in all of Western music who have had this extraordinary ability. The formula used by Milán in the majority of his fantasias is to construct an initial episode with longer themes that recalls the opening gestures of polyphonic madrigals and motets. This initial section is customarily followed by a succession of shorter episodes based on multiple repetitions of short motives. These, in particular, are the sections that give the impression of being imitative counterpoint, but they are really idiomatic textures designed to fit easily under the player's fingers and emulate the sound of more complex writing. Milán usually signifies the approaching conclusion of his fantasias by repeating the music of his final episode. This sends a clear signal that the spinning out of new material has finished, thus creating a sense of repose and conclusion.

Within this fantasia style, there is one particular group of works that is based on a more overt idiomatic style, built from contrasting sections of virtuosic writing in rapid scales (*redobles*) with others based on sombre chord

sequences (*consonancias*), as well as others in his customary pseudo-imitative style. Milán refers to these works as *Fantásias de consonancias y redobles*, or "festive" fantasias in the *tañer de gala* style. The four *tentos* in the second *libro* of *El Maestro* are nothing more than extended fantasias in the *tañer de gala* style.

The present recording by José Antonio Escobar presents all the works for solo vihuela from the first *libro* of *El Maestro* in the order in which they appear in the book. In this book, it is clear from the outset that the music is, in fact, of considerably greater difficulty than most teachers would use with beginners. Even the very first fantasia is quite sophisticated in many ways. We catch a glimpse of Milán the teacher in his recommendation for this piece that it should be played quickly: "the faster you play it, the better it will sound". These are clearly words of encouragement for a beginner battling to master the piece rather a literal instruction to play at a very fast tempo.

The first *libro* is organised in the following way: *Fantásias Nos. 1-9* are of increasing difficulty and are composed moving through the modal cycle using modes 1-4. The following nine fantasias, *Nos. 10-18*, are *fantásias de consonancias y redobles* that progressively explore the full spectrum of modes 1-8. The next group of fantasias, *Nos. 19-22*, pick up where the first group finished and are composed in modes 5-8. These are followed by the *pavanas*, works composed by Milán in the style of Italian dances of which he says "These six fantasias that follow, as I said earlier, appear in their style and texture to be like the very pavañes that are played in Italy, and because they resemble them in every way, let us speak of them as pavañes" (*Estas seys fantasias que se siguen como arriba hos dixen parescen en su ayre y compostura alas mesmas pauanas que en Ytalia se tañen: y pues en todo remedan a ellas digamosles pauanas...*) It is interesting to note that the last of these pieces is in triple time and has all the hallmarks of a galliard. Similarly, comparison of *Pavana No. 4* with the last fantasia in the book, *Fantasia No. 22*, shows this latter work to be built on the thematic material of the *pavana*.

John Griffiths

José Antonio Escobar



Photo: José Antonio de Pablo

José Antonio Escobar is one of the most distinguished and versatile classical guitar soloists of his generation. He is especially known for the perfect balance he achieves between intense musical expression and a vast knowledge of various musical styles and periods. He was born in Santiago, Chile, where he graduated with top honours after studying at the Conservatory of Music, University of Chile. Immediately after graduating he continued his studies at the Hochschule für Musik in Augsburg, Germany. Under the influence of his first master, the lutenist Ernesto Quezada, he became deeply interested in early instruments of the guitar family. This motivated him to complete his studies by attending Early Music courses and master-classes with renowned specialists such as Hopkinson Smith, Eduardo Egüez, and Juan Carlos Rivera. He combines his interest in early music with the contemporary, with particular attention to Chilean composers. He has been awarded some fifteen prizes in leading international guitar competitions, including the Francisco Tárrega (Spain), Alessandria (Italy), Alhambra (Spain), Guitar Foundation of America (USA), Julián Arcas (Spain), and Karl Scheit (Austria). He has appeared widely as a soloist with orchestra and in recital and has a number of successful recordings to his credit.

Although biographical details of his life remain sketchy, Luys Milán's *Libro de música de vihuela de mano intitulado El Maestro* is certainly the oldest surviving printed collection of vihuela music. Tuned like the contemporary Renaissance lute, the Spanish vihuela is a guitar-shaped instrument and for it Milán wrote a series of compelling works including fantasias and pavans that maturely fused improvisatory and polyphonic elements. This recording presents all the solo vihuela pieces from the first book of *El Maestro* in the order in which they appear.



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MILAN
(c. 1500-c. 1561)

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Works for Solo Vihuela

1-9	Fantasías de consonancias	17:25
10-18	Fantasías de consonancias y redobles	23:53
19-22	Fantasías de consonancias	13:29
23-28	6 Pavanas	11:18

José Antonio Escobar, Vihuela de mano

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.

Recorded at The Green Room, Offord Hall, Aurora, Ontario, Canada, from 1st to 4th May, 2014

Producers: Norbert Kraft and Bonnie Silver • Engineer: Norbert Kraft • Editor: Bonnie Silver

Vihuela made by Julio Castaños (Málaga, 2013)

Booklet notes: John Griffiths