

# Summer "School"

## The MUSEG Organ Course in Segovia, Spain



Cathedral of Segovia (left: *órgano de la Epístola*; right: *órgano del Evangelio*)

By L. Camille Johnson

The summer can be a challenging time for organists who do not serve in a church or are on break from full-time study. While eight to ten weeks of vacation do have the potential to be a productive time, they often fall short of expectations. Still, there are ways to stay musically engaged during the summer, including practicing for a competition, attending a Pipe Organ Encounter, or preparing for an AGO certification exam. Another option is to attend an international summer organ course, which provides a perfect means of staying focused on practice and performance while also enjoying an “organ”-ized vacation. In the summer of 2022, I participated in the annual MUSEG Organ Course in Segovia, Spain, which provided an opportunity for total immersion: historical, cultural, musical, and social.

When I applied to attend MUSEG, I submitted an online form including my name and date of birth, a list of the repertoire I would prepare, a curriculum vitae, and a recent performance video. For active participants, the registration fee was 200 euros, which included room and board, participation in daily masterclasses with the professors, the opportunity to perform in the four programs of the “Ruta del Órgano,” a certificate of completion, and admission to all festival concerts held during the course. There was also a spectator option, in which individuals could observe the masterclasses, attend the concerts, and receive a certificate of participation.

The MUSEG course ran with a full schedule from July 25 to 31, 2022. In total, we visited eight organs throughout the region of Segovia. The first evening featured a recital by the two organ professors, Ángel Montero Herrero and Mónica Melcova, at Segovia Cathedral. The cathedral’s two instruments, the *órgano de la Epístola* and the *órgano del Evangelio*, were built in 1702 and 1769–72 by Pedro de Liborna Echevarría and José Liborna Echevarría—grandfather and grandson—respectively. They were maintained for over 200 years by members of the Echevarría family.<sup>1</sup> During the course, students participated in several masterclasses on these magnificent instruments, gaining firsthand experience of the grandeur of Iberian Baroque organs.



Órgano de la Epístola, built in 1702 by Pedro de Liborna Echevarría



Órgano del Evangelio, built in 1769–72 by José Liborna Echevarría

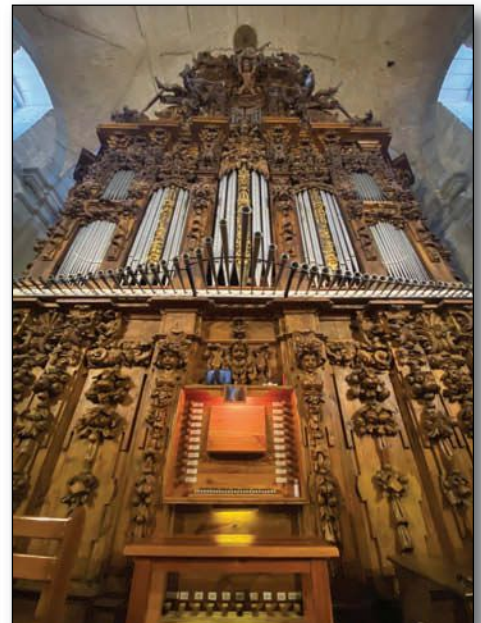
The Echevarría family was very active in the region. In 1703, Pedro de Liborna Echevarría was named *Órganero del Rey* (the king's organbuilder), a title through which he and his descendants secured their legacy. Three other organs visited during the summer course were built and maintained by members of the Echevarría family: the organ of San Lorenzo Mártir, Abades, built in 1698; the organ of Santuario de la Fuencisla, built in 1701; and the organ of San Eutropio, El Espinar, built in 1709–12.



The organ of San Lorenzo Mártir, Abades, built in 1698 by Pedro Liborna Echevarría (from the "Ruta del Órgano" program on Sunday, July 31, 2022)



The organ of Santuario de la Fuencisla, built in 1701 by Pedro Liborna Echevarría

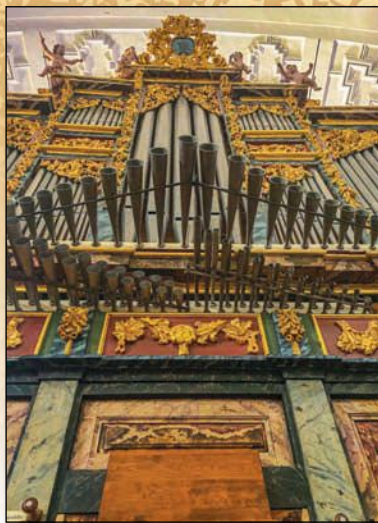


The organ of San Eutropio, El Espinar, built in 1709–12 by Pedro Liborna Echevarría (from the "Ruta del Órgano" program on Saturday, July 30, 2022)

Francisco Ortega Pérez was another important organbuilder during this time,<sup>2</sup> and we visited two of his instruments: those at the Iglesia de San Bartolomé, Martín Miguel, built in 1725, and at the Iglesia de San Bartolomé, Sangarcía, also built in 1725. Many of the organs in the Segovia region have been maintained and restored by Joaquín Lois Cabello.<sup>3</sup> Since 2022, the MUSEG Organ Course's roster of instruments has shifted, since the region is rich with beautiful historic Iberian organs and time does not allow course participants to visit them all.



The organ of the Iglesia de San Bartolomé, Martín Miguel, built in 1725 by Francisco Ortega Pérez (from the “Ruta del Órgano” program on Saturday, July 30, 2022)



The organ of the Iglesia de San Bartolomé, Sangarcía, also built in 1725 by Francisco Ortega Pérez (from the “Ruta del Órgano” program on Sunday, July 31, 2022)



The author with Mónica Melcova (left) and Ángel Montero Herrero (right) during a masterclass

These historic instruments include many characteristic features of the Iberian Baroque organ, including the *teclado partido*, or divided keyboard, which utilizes half stops, or *medios registros*. On a single manual, the keyboard would be divided in half, most frequently split between middle C-sharp and D. Ranks of pipes would then be divided between *izquierda* (left) and *derecha* (right) and could be controlled independently of one another, allowing two separate sounds to be produced by a single keyboard. While both halves of the keyboard would always have the foundational registrations—8', 4', 2 $\frac{3}{5}$ ', 2', and 1 $\frac{3}{5}$ '—either side could have independent solo sounds. Other distinctive Spanish features are the *Tambor en Re y La* (drum on D and A), which creates a timpani effect; the *Cajas de eco*, pipes enclosed in a chamber that can be opened and closed with the use of a knee lever (an early version of a swell pedal); and an entire soundscape of colorful reeds—*reales* (full-length) and *cortos* (half-length)—which contribute to the Spanish flair. Among reeds such as *Obué*, *Clarinete*, *Dulzaina*, *Corneta*, and *Clarín*, one cannot forget the *Trompetas de batalla* (reeds placed horizontally on the facade of the organ) and the *Trompetas interiores* (reeds placed vertically, encased within the organ).<sup>4</sup> While the majority of the instruments featured in the course utilized a short octave, one outlier exists: the organ at Santuario de la Fuencisla has a full compass.

The *teclado partido* building technique featured on the instruments used throughout the course allowed participants to focus on early Spanish and Italian repertoire, which frequently exploits this element. Students in the course performed in a series of four recitals called the “Ruta del Órgano.”<sup>5</sup> These programs featured repertoire by Spanish composers such as Antonio de Cabezón, Francisco Correa de Arauxo, Pablo Bruna, Francisco de Peraza, Juan Bautista Cabanilles, and Sebastián Aguilera de Heredia. Composers from an Italian background, such as Scarlatti, Zipoli, Pasquini, Trabaci, Frescobaldi, and Rossi, also have pieces that would

work well in this context. Additionally, music by other early composers, such as Kerll, Muffat, and Sweelinck, might provide a unique opportunity to combine Northern European compositional style with traditional Iberian sounds.

The MUSEG Organ Course was an unforgettable experience that taught students more than just how to perform Spanish music. The opportunity to meet new colleagues led to encounters with new composers, sounds, timbres, and expression. It was more than an educational experience: it was a personal and intimate participation in living history. The next MUSEG Organ Course should also prove to be a life-changing experience; it will take place July 22–28, 2024. Organ professors will be Ángel Montero Herrero and Bálint Karosi. To learn more, visit [museg.org/curso-de-organo-museg-2024](http://museg.org/curso-de-organo-museg-2024).

#### NOTES

1. Jesús Gonzalo López and Frédéric Desmottes, “El Órgano de la Epístola de la Catedral de Segovia: Parte Instrumental,” *Patrimonio histórico de Castilla y León*, no. 45 (2011): 51–58.
2. Museo virtual del Órgano (website), s.v. “Francisco Ortega Pérez,” accessed Mar. 7, 2024, [museovirtualdelorgano.com/indices/organeros/francisco-ortega-perez](http://museovirtualdelorgano.com/indices/organeros/francisco-ortega-perez).
3. For more information on Cabello, visit [JoaquinLois.com](http://JoaquinLois.com).
4. Mark J. Merrill, “The Early Iberian Organ: Design and Disposition,” *The Diapason*, Nov. 2012, 25.
5. Recital dates and venues for the “Ruta del Órgano” are listed in the image captions.

*The photographic documentation accompanying this article was captured by the author in July 2022.*

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