

“La música:”  
poema por Tomás de Iriarte

A Critical Edition

*by*

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## Introduction

¡Encantadora ciencia, don del cielo,  
Recreo de la humana fantasía,  
De los males consuelo,  
Del alma fiel intérprete! Permite  
Que tu hermana la dulce Poesía  
Investigar tus leyes solicite.

TOMÁS DE IRIARTE

*Aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae*  
[To teach—to please—comprise the poet's views]

HORACE, *Arte poetica*

Athenaeus assures us, that in former times, all laws, human and divine, exhortations to virtue, the knowledge of what concerned the gods and heroes, the lives and actions of illustrious men, were written in verse, and sung publicly in choirs by the sound of instruments...

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU, *A Dictionary of Music*

Música y poesía  
En una misma lira tocaremos.

TOMÁS DE IRIARTE

### 1. THE UNIQUENESS OF *LA MÚSICA*, POEMA POR D. TOMÁS DE IRIARTE

The publication of a critical edition of Tomás de Iriarte's *La música* could be viewed as a milestone for eighteenth-century Spanish studies, since to date, there exists no modern critical edition of the poem that owns the distinction of being a unique document in eighteenth-century Europe, “[una] obra pionera” in the words of musicologist Javier Suárez-Pajares, and one of the century’s most “influential works” in a period in which the didactic mode is the representative norm, as noted by Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo in his *Historia de las ideas estéticas en España*. For literary historian Víctor García de la Concha, *La música* is “the most famous didactic poem of the century.”<sup>1</sup> The fact that *La música* is the

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<sup>1</sup> See Javier Suárez-Pajares, “Tomás de Iriarte”. *Diccionario de la música*

longest poem written in Spanish during the century and that it was conceived and written by one of the century's most important neo-classical authors is yet another first. That *La música* qualifies as one of the few Spanish texts that was translated to other European languages—which permitted the poem to reach an extended readership beyond the Peninsula, and to attain a notable degree of international success—is no small feat either, in a century in which Spain was viewed by some Europeans as a provincial nation with almost nothing of import to contribute to the continent.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the translation of *La música* into Italian, French, English, and German—two of these which then merited multiple editions—underscores the poem's singularity, since within the corpus of eighteenth-century European literature there exists no comparable poem that addresses the subject of music in the comprehensive and encyclopedic manner as does Iriarte's proportionally epic work. Nine early editions in Spanish and seven translated editions prove that for most of a century Iriarte's *La música* captured the interest of readers in Europe and Spanish-America, a notable feat considering the genre—didactic poetry—and the seemingly specialized subject.<sup>3</sup> That Iriarte's poem captivates the attention of modern readers is evident by

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*española e hispanoamericana*. Ed. Emilio Casares Rodicio. V.6. (Madrid: Sociedad General de Autores y Editores, 2000) 472; Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo, *Historia de las ideas estéticas en España*. 4<sup>a</sup> edición (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1974) 1597; and Víctor García de la Concha, *Historia de la literatura española*. Siglo XVIII (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1995) 260. All translations to English from foreign-language texts are by the author of this edition unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> See Francisco Sánchez-Blanco Parody's *Europa y el pensamiento español del siglo XVIII* for European views of Spain during the period; and David T. Gies, "Dos preguntas regeneracionistas: '¿Qué se debe a España?' y '¿Qué es España?'. Identidad Nacional en Forner, Moratín Jovellanos y la Generación de 1898" *Dieciocho*. Vol. 22. No. 2 (Fall 1999) 307-30, which discusses the consequences of an article published in the *Encyclopédie méthodique* (1782) by Nicolás Masson de Morvilliers questioning the relevance of Spain. This article, according to Gies, initiated a "crisis de consciencia en la España ilustrada" and no doubt, motivated apologetic works by Spanish ilustrados (307).

<sup>3</sup> A copy of a Mexican edition of *La música*, published by Zúñiga y Ontiveros in 1785, currently held in the Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid, had been owned by the ill-fated Emperor Maximiliano and was sold for 218 reales in 1869 in an auction in Leipzig. See Francisco José León Tello, *La teoría española de la música en los siglos XVII y XVIII* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1974).

the publication during the last few decades of two facsimile editions, reproductions of the 1779 Imprenta Real de la Gazeta, one by Gustavo Gili in 1984 and one by Espasa-Calpe in 1987, both with no critical apparatus. More recently in 2004 there was a special edition “no venal” of the poem produced by the Ayuntamiento de Madrid which did contain three essays by distinguished Spanish scholars Guillermo Carnero, Begoña Lolo, and Andrés Ruiz Tarazona.<sup>4</sup> The fact that this particular edition was not made for sale or distribution to the public only underscores the imperative for a modern edition with introductory material that can facilitate the comprehension of this unique literary work whose language, structure and, in some ways, content are increasingly foreign to our postmodern sensibilities.

If the sounds and rhythms of Iriarte’s language are removed from us today, his subject and the manner in which he treated it give us a revealing glimpse into music culture of the eighteenth century, and especially into the mind of an ardent music lover, amateur violinist, composer, apologist and astute student of the philosophy of art. Music was a notable part of the daily life of eighteenth-century European citizens. The sounds of music in the streets, in the taverns and inns, in the salons and the Court, in the Church –but especially in the theatres, where Italian *opera-seria* was a principal form of entertainment–were accompanied by the discourse surrounding music in the pamphlets, articles and treatises written by almost anyone it seems with an interest in doing so. Music had become a timely subject of interest, a stimulant for the senses and the intellect of the aristocracy and the emerging middle classes. But we must qualify the concept of music especially as regards thinking and writing about it as a subject of inquiry, for as historians of the eighteenth century have noted, for most of the century it was impossible to conceive of music apart from the genre of poetry. For most thinkers in the Age of Enlightenment, the nature of music was an anomaly and it did not fit easily into existing structures of analysis. Music was viewed as potentially threatening because of its “irrational” power to seduce, and since the pleasure that music produced had been condemned on moralistic grounds by writers of the previous century, music was still viewed with suspicion by some. The close association of music with words in opera allowed rationalist thinkers to comprehend it in terms of the classical theory of mimesis which views art as an imitation of the world. Music, then, would come to be viewed first as an imitation of language

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<sup>4</sup>This edition of *La música* was reviewed by Russell Sebold in *Dieciocho* 28.2 (2005) 156-158.

and human emotions; and subsequently, as a portrayal or an expression of emotions. Philosophical discussions surrounding the nature of this most elusive and fleeting art form and its moral value would reach a peak during the eighteenth century, with the topic of music and the processes of portraying the emotion of the text and moving the emotions of listeners occupying much of the critical writing. As a musical public came into its own with new expectations for performance and composition, amateur musical culture flourished and the use of music as ornament, as a display of social distinction, and as a mark of civil behavior and good taste would pass from the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie.<sup>5</sup>

Iriarte himself was aware that his poem was opportune and unique, having reviewed other apparently similar poems by European writers, and finding none that presented the material both analytically and comprehensively, he commented in his prologue on this ‘oversight’ which seemed all the more unusual given the number of didactic poems dealing with various subjects including those specifically concerned with the rules of poetry, such as poems by Horace, Vida and Boileau. Guided by the form and content of Horace’s poem, and also by the *Gramática latina... en verso castellano* written by Iriarte’s uncle and mentor, Juan de Iriarte, the young author set about the task of writing the first “arte poético” on a subject which, by the middle of the century had become the rage in European theaters and salons, as well as a heated topic of debate among polemicists throughout the continent. The original idea for the poem was most likely born in the musical *tertulias* held at the home of Iriarte’s friends and protectors, Pablo de Aragón y Azlor and María Manuela Pignatelli de Aragón Gonzaga (the Duke and Duchess of Villahermosa), where discussions on the topic of music and on the nature of didactic poetry –“a genre in vogue at the time although seldom cultivated in Spain”<sup>6</sup> –had inspired young Tomás, an amateur musician, poet, and student of the classics, to undertake the first three cantos of the work for the amusement of himself and friends, as indicated in his prologue. Soon afterwards, this work-in-progress would secure the interest and backing of one of the most powerful ministers of Carlos III, José Moñino, the Count of Floridablanca, alluded to by Iriarte in his prologue as the Mecenás, the “personaje que bajo el inmediato patrocinio de nuestro

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<sup>5</sup> The doctrine of affections and the notion of music as ornament and as status symbol will be discussed in subsequent sections of this introduction.

<sup>6</sup> Rinaldo Frolidi, “Tomás de Iriarte, musico e poeta della Spagna illuministica.” *Studi in onore de Guisepppe Vecchi*. Ivano Cavallini, ed. (Modena, Italia: Mucchi, 1989) 97.